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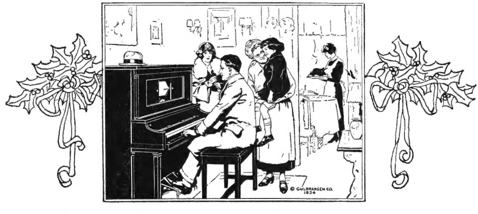
PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

Gordon Young
Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur
J. D. Newsom
Arthur O. Friel
John Murray Reynolds
J. Allan Dunn
Charles Victor Fischer
Richard [illegible] Watkins
Post Sargent

3 Complete Novelettes



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Right now—before Christmas—send your address for this fascinating book, "Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment," and hear all about the Gulbransen and where to try it. No obligation whatever, mail the coupon at once if you want to learn about the finest surprise you could give your family.

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Four Upright Models—Community, $450; Suburban, $530; Country Seat, $615; White House, $700; Straight Grand, $785; Registering Grand, $1275.

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The Nat'l Ass'n of Piano Tuners recommends that all pianos be tuned twice a year. Your Gulbransen deserves this care

"His Tail Between His Legs"

What most men would see if they could see themselves.

MOST men are being whipped every day in the battle of life. Many have already reached the stage where they have **THEIR TAILS BETWEEN THEIR LEGS.**

They are afraid of everything and everybody. They live in a constant fear of being deprived of the pitiful existence they are leading. Vaguely they hope for **SOMETHING TO TURN UP** that will make them unafraid, courageous, independent.

While they hope vainly, they drift along, with no definite purpose, no definite plan, nothing ahead of them but old age. The scourgings of life do not help such men. In fact, the more lashes they receive at the hands of fate, the more **COWED** they become.

What becomes of these men? They are the wage slaves. They are the "little-business" slaves, the millions of clerks, storekeepers, bookkeepers, laborers, assistants, secretaries, salesmen. They are the millions who work and sweat and—**MAKE OTHERS RICH AND HAPPY!**

The pity of it is, nothing can **SHAKE THEM** out of their complacency. Nothing can stir them out of the mental rut into which they have sunk.

Their wives, too, quickly lose ambition and become slaves—slaves to their kitchens, slaves to their children, slaves to their husbands—slaves to their homes. And with such examples before them, what hope is there for their children **BUT TO GROW UP INTO SLAVERY.**

Some men, however, after years of cringing, turn on life. They **CHALLENGE** the whipper. They discover, perhaps to their own surprise, that it isn't so difficult as they imagined, **TO SET A HIGH GOAL**—and reach it! Only a few try—it is true—but that makes it easier for those who **DO** try.

The rest quit. They show a yellow streak as broad as their backs. They are through—and in their hearts they know it. Not that they are beyond help, but that they have acknowledged defeat, laid down their arms, stopped using their heads, and have simply said to life, "Now do with me as you will."

What about **YOU**? Are you ready to admit that you are through? Are you content to sit back and wait for something to turn up? Have you shown a yellow streak in **YOUR** Battle of Life? Are you satisfied to keep your wife and children—and yourself—enslaved? **ARE YOU AFRAID OF LIFE?**

Success is a simple thing to acquire when you know its formula. The first ingredient is a grain of **COURAGE**. The second is a dash of **AMBITION**. The third is an ounce of **MENTAL EFFORT**. Mix the whole with your God-given faculties and no power on earth can keep you from your desires, be they what they may.

Most people actually use about **ONE-TENTH** of their brain capacity. It is as if they were deliberately trying to remain twelve years old mentally. They do not profit by the experience they have gained, nor by the experience of others.

You can develop these God-given faculties by yourself—without outside help; or you can do as **SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND** other people have done—study Pelmanism.

Pelmanism is the science of applied psychology, which has swept the world with the force of a religion. It is a fact that more than 650,000 people have become Pelmanists—all over the civilized world—and Pelmanism has awakened powers in them they did not **DREAM** they possessed.

Famous people all over the world advocate Pelmanism, men and women such as these:

T. P. O'Connor, "Father of the House of Commons."
The late Sir H. Rider-Haggard, Famous novelist.
Frank P. Walsh, Former Chairman of National War Labor Board.
Jerome K. Jerome, Novelist.

What most men would see if they could see themselves.

General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Founder of the Boy Scout Movement.
Judge Ben B. Lindsey, Founder of the Juvenile Court, Denver.
Sir Harry Lauder, Comedian.
W. L. George, Author.
Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff.
Admiral Lord Beresford, G. C. B., G. C. V. O.
Baroness Orczy, Author.
Prince Charles of Sweden.

—and others, of equal prominence, too numerous to mention here.

A remarkable book called "Scientific Mind-Training," has been written about Pelmanism. **IT CAN BE OBTAINED FREE.** Yet thousands of people who read this announcement and who **NEED** this book will not send for it. "It's no use," they will say. "It will do me no good," they will tell themselves. "It's all tommyrot," others will say.

But if they use their **HEADS** they will realize that people cannot be **HELPED** by tommyrot and that there **MUST** be something in Pelmanism, when it has such a record behind it, and when it is endorsed by the kind of people listed above.

If you are made of the stuff that isn't content to remain a slave—if you have taken your last whipping from life,—if you have a spark of **INDEPENDENCE** left in your soul, write for this free book. It tells you what Pelmanism is, **WHAT IT HAS DONE FOR OTHERS**, and what it can do for you.

The first principle of **YOUR** success is to do something radical in your life. You cannot make just an ordinary move, for you will soon again sink into the mire of discouragement. Let Pelmanism help you **FIND YOURSELF**. Mail the coupon below now—now while your resolve to **DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF** is strong.

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New York City.

I want you to show me what Pelmanism has actually done for over 650,000 people. Please send me your free book, "Scientific Mind Training." This places me under no obligation whatever.

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City .... State ....

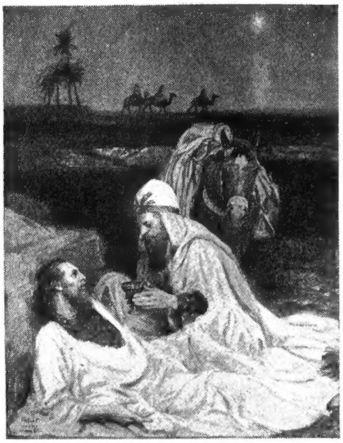
ADVENTURE
Dec. 30th, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 56
Number 3

Giving Good Gifts

WHAT a lovely thing it is—the Christmas spirit—that prompts men and women to forget self and open hearts and purses that others may be made happy. But sometimes that very spirit—beautiful as it is—sweeps one into gift-giving which is embarrassing. In our efforts to spread gladness as far as we can, we frequently send gifts to those who have much "gold, frankincense and myrrh" and would appreciate a kindly Christmas thought more than an expensive gift.



At the Wayside

In a beautiful Christmas story, we read of a Fourth Wise Man who was turned from his high purpose of bearing offerings to the new-born King by a compelling impulse to help the suffering at the wayside. Yet in the end was his honor all the greater. The allegory is plain:—the worthy desire to give costly gifts to those we love should not keep us from helping the unfriended and the needy.

When well and happy we are apt to forget the sick and suffering and needy—men and women and little children to whom Christmas has brought nothing but heartbreak and hopes denied, whose lives, drab at best, are made even more dreary by contrast with the gladness and cheer of the Yuletide season.

Try a New Plan this Year

This Christmas, give good gifts—not as custom dictates, but as your heart prompts. Give lavishly as your means will permit. Give to those you love and those to whom your gift will bring gladness. Give as far and as widely as you can. But in your giving set apart something—a little or much—for those who are in *need* of Christmas gifts. It is not necessary to have a great deal of money to extend your gift-giving beyond your immediate circle. Perhaps you can spare only a dollar, or a twenty-five-cent piece, or a dime.

Give Wisely

If you do not know any unfortunate families who need your help, or if you feel that the amount you can give is too small to be of use, give to one of the many well-organized relief and welfare societies. They are in a position to investigate needy cases and will use your money to do the greatest amount of good. They supply warm clothing, they furnish nourishing dinners and distribute toys to eager youngsters who have written confidingly to Santa Claus. It is impossible to calculate the good which these charitable agencies do in giving new hope and cheer to those sick in spirit and in body. They need your help.

—This Christmas, give good gifts—the gifts of happiness and cheer and encouragement. When you are making merry around your tree know the joy of feeling that others are having a brighter Christmas because you have given from your heart.

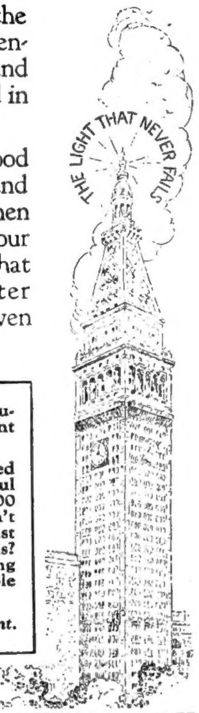
You who are well and happy this Christmas—who are looking forward to a day of gladness spent with your dear ones—won't you help spread cheer and comfort among those stricken with Tuberculosis?

All over the world today are thousands and thousands of sufferers from Tuberculosis. In this country alone it is estimated that there are 1,000,000 men, women and children afflicted with this dread disease.

Christmas Seals help to support more than 600 hospitals and sanatoria, with nearly 70,000 beds; more than 600 clinics and dispensaries; 3,000 open-air schools, fresh air classes and outdoor camps for children predisposed to Tuberculosis; 10,000 nurses who are giving treatment and health instructions.

The cheery little Christmas Seals which are used to fight Tuberculosis offer an instance of useful giving. Whether your income is $50,000, $5,000 or $500 a year—here is a way to help. Won't you do this simple, gracious thing—buy at least a dollar's or a dime's worth of Christmas Seals? They cost only a penny apiece. Others, seeing your Seals may be reminded to join in the noble work of fighting the Great White Plague.

HALEY FISKE, *President*.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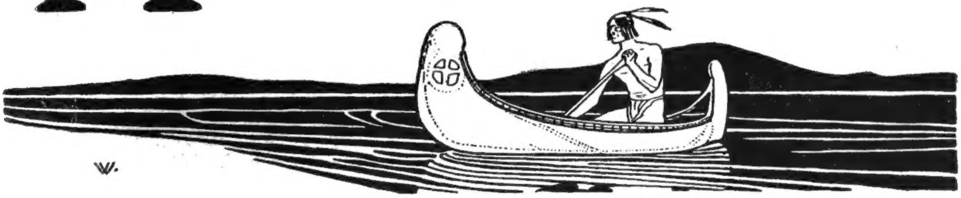

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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Headings . . . . **B. Westmacott**

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Three Complete Novelettes

"I, *THEOPHILO* of the Upper Rivers, know a man when I see him." And then came the *Fire-Head.* "HE SHALL HAVE WHO BEST CAN KEEP," a complete novelette by Gordon MacCreagh, will appear in the next issue.

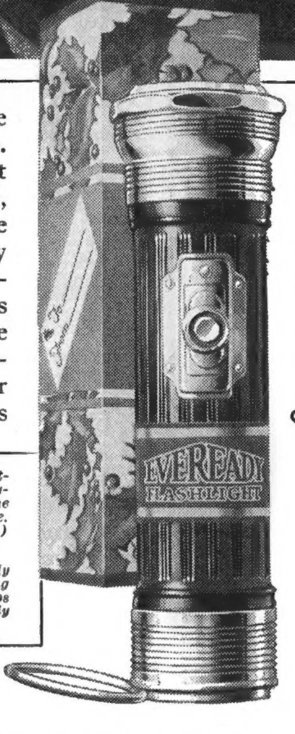
TIMES were very hard on the Barbary Coast. Ships tied up instead of sailing. And *Charley Peace, Mister Peace* if you please, one-time mate of sorts, was as hungry as the best of them. But *Peace* had a good, substantial name and *Lucky Lamont,* master of the *Oloron,* was quick in seeing the significance of that name. "THE SPANISH TORNADO," a complete novelette by Norman Springer, will appear in the next issue.

KHLIT, *Kirdy* and *Ayub*—the Three Horsemen of The Steppes—came to the stronghold of the winged rider; a strange place where *Erlik Kahn* was said to practise black magic. The Volga pirates were in the forest, and *Kirdy* learned a thing which a Cossack Ataman should know. "THE WINGED RIDER," a complete novelette by Harold Lamb, will be in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

"Merry Christmas to all and to all a good LIGHT!"



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(Center Above)

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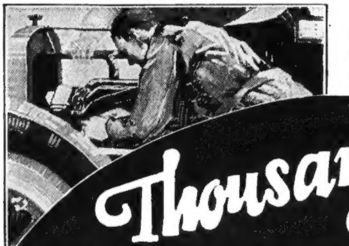

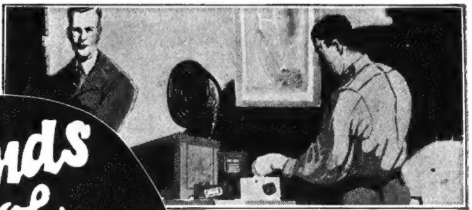

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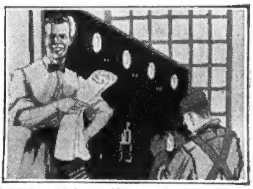

$125 a Week "Depend on me as a booster," says A. Schreck, Phoenix, Ariz. "I make over $500 a month. Your advertisment started me to success."

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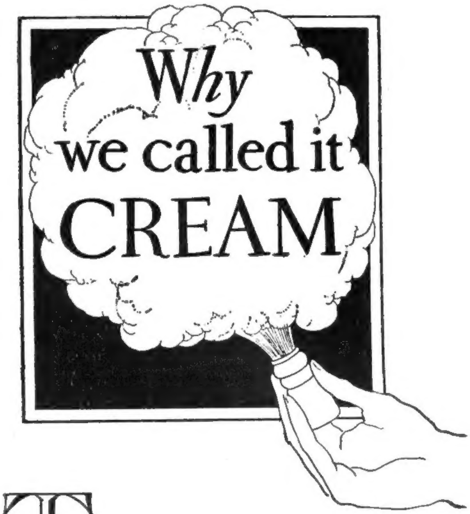

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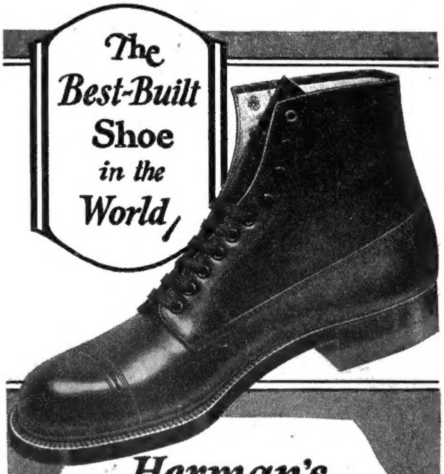

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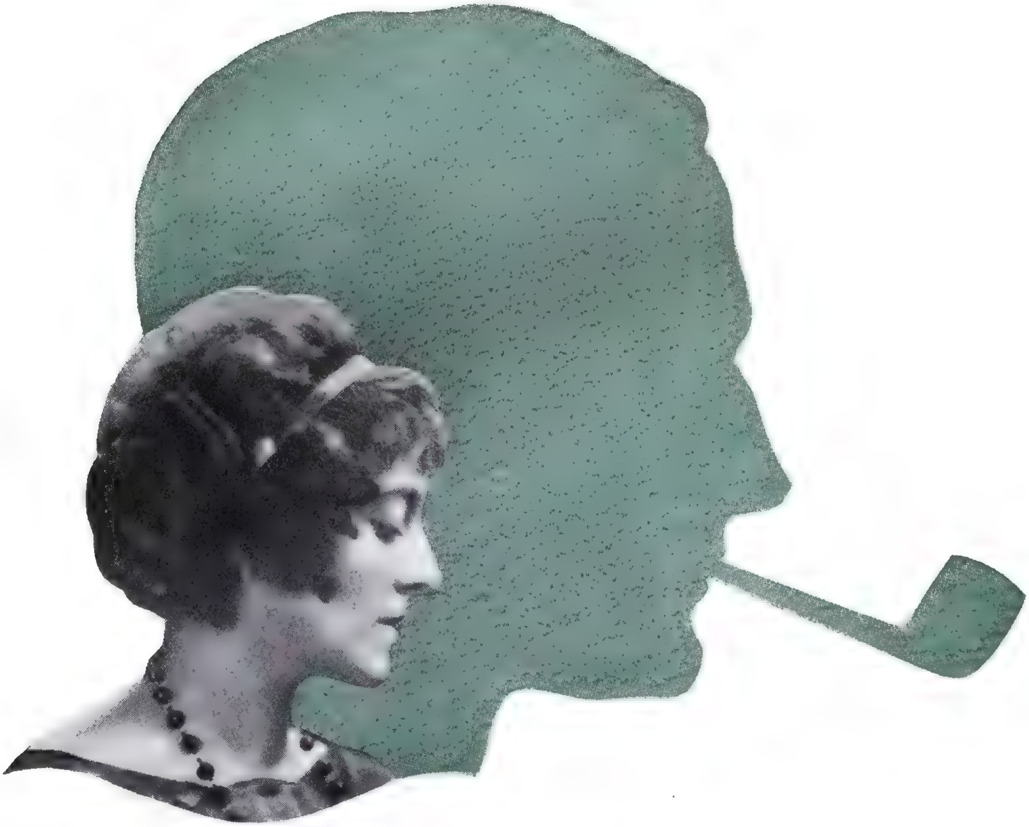

"I enjoy seeing a man smoke a pipe. It seems so peaceful"... Elsie Janis

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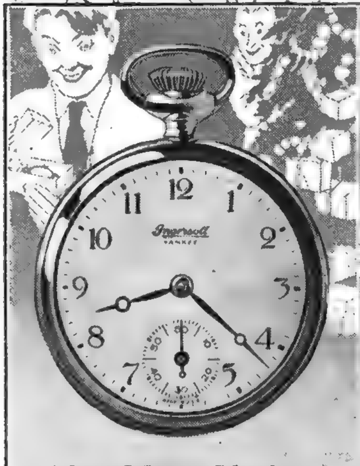
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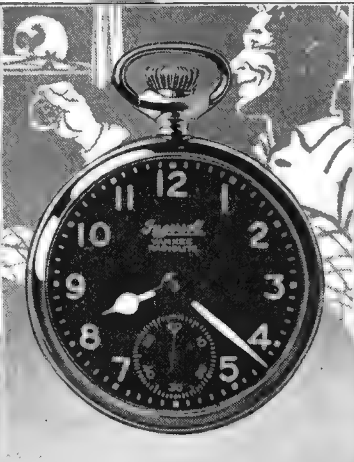
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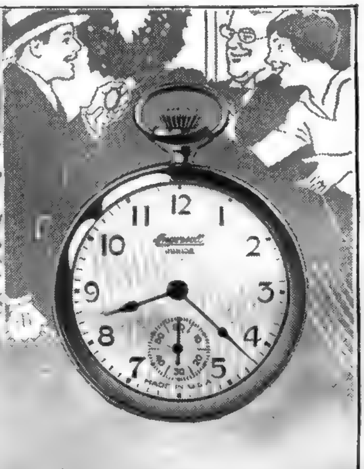
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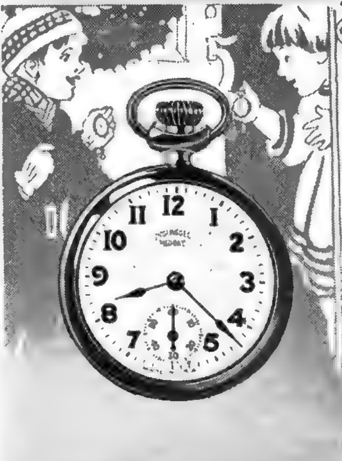
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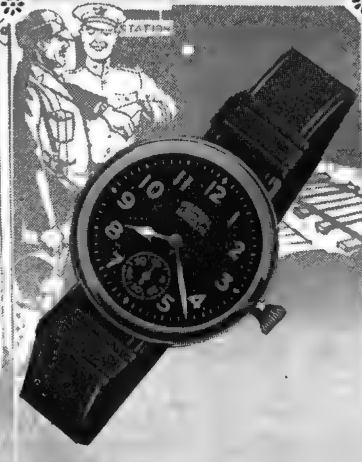

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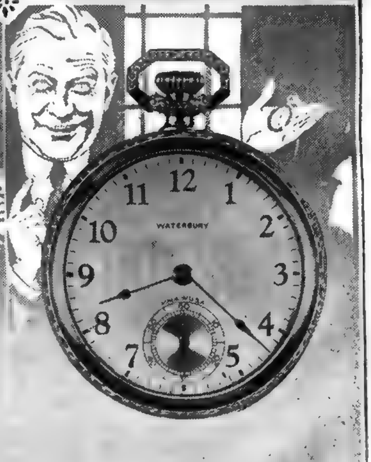

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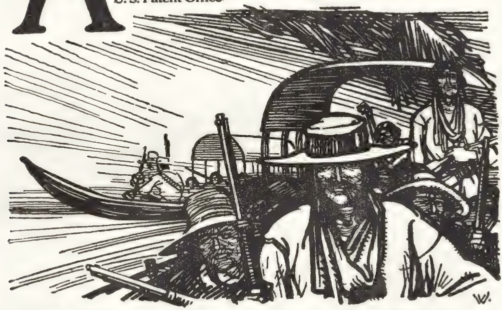

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

A Complete Novelette by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "Hard Wood," "Tiger River," etc.

FOUR hundred miles from the sea, the adobe settlement of Caicara squatted on the south shore of the tawny river Orinoco.

Fifty miles upstream, heading seaward, a dingy gray launch butted its prow through a rolling horde of waves and doggedly advanced in the teeth of the northeast tradewind.

Midway between town and boat, and three leagues up a nameless tributary, a long fleet of dugout canoes crawled like a great snake toward the master river.

Over all these, as over all the wide, wild reaches of Venezuela, blazed torrid sun.

In the low, mud-walled houses and the crooked streets of the pueblo moved the leisurely life of the townspeople; petty trading in the crude shops, with much converse and little cash; slow arrivals and departures of straw-sombreroed men and sleepy-eyed burros; giggling gossip among *mestizo* women in patios or at doorways; an occasional shrill squabble between scantily clad children; all the trivialities which went to make up an average equatorial day. Within only one set of walls did thought reach beyond the passing hour—in the official home of the *jefe civil*, or town authority. There, grouped at a massive table, the half-dozen leading merchants held gloomy converse with the arbiter of the town's problems. At every sudden sound—even the abrupt yelp of a kicked dog—these men started as if at a volley of rifle-shots.

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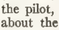
Up in the nameless *caño* at the westward, the floating serpent swam steadily, though slowly, with a rhythmic dull cadence of pulsing paddles. Every hollowed segment of its loose-jointed back was crammed with men; men with stolid faces, peering slit-eyed through clouds of mosquitoes as they plied their broad blades; men with visages saturnine, satirical, sinister; men with expressions reckless, humorous, vivacious, or coldly predacious, or heavily brutal. Between their feet lay rifles, ranging in make from clumsy single-shot bush guns to heavy-barreled repeaters, and from these to high-powered European military arms. Around their hips or over their chests looped belts or bandoleers of cartridges; and at their waists jutted hilts of poniards or machetes. No idly gliding snake was this, but one advancing with grim purpose. And, though traversing swamp-lands inhabited only by smaller snakes, fierce beasts, silent birds, and skulking human outcasts, it moved with eyes alert and fangs ready to strike.

Under the faded awning of the motor launch lounged three men and a maid, watching the endless echelon of yellow waves and the monotonous clay banks topped by unvarying verdure. Of these four, only one was native born: a leathery-cheeked, crafty-eyed fellow, loose-garmented, alpargata-shod, and unarmed, whose constant study of landmarks and currents marked him as the pilot. The other men, though deeply tanned and garbed in baggy tropical clothing, had features and physique suggesting a more northern clime; the one blond, strong-mouthed, wide-shouldered, tall and lithe, the other florid of skin, gray of eye, and Celtic of lineament, with the powerful build of a heavyweight fighter. Dissimilar, yet potentially dangerous, these two, as a tiger and a bull. The tiger, however, was crippled, his left arm hanging useless in a sling. Yet the sinewy right hand which occasionally caressed the butt of a long revolver at his thigh betokened readiness to meet any human menace, and the blue eyes glancing along the shores now and again showed a glint of steel. His broader mate was likewise armed; and near at hand leaned a pair of big-bored repeaters. The girl, clad in mannish blouse, trim riding breeches, and natty boots, seemed more boy than woman. Her small chin was firm, her dark eyes direct and steady, her poise cool, capable, and confident. Judging from her manner, one might have said that she was as much at home here as her sun-branded companions. But both her Northern clothing and her rose-flushed skin, only lightly burned, proved her to be a newcomer.

Save for the swash of divided waves, the drone of the engine, the muffled panting of the exhaust, and an occasional grunt from the pilot, lazy silence reigned aboard and about the launch. Shaded by the heavy top and fanned by the lusty wind, the voyagers rode in quiescent comfort. Nowhere in all the broad vista beyond them rose any sail, any steamer-smoke, or even the low-riding dots betokening men in a canoe. All the river seemed their own. Yet all four watched constantly ahead—the girl as if awaiting the appearance of some destination, the men as if long habituated to wary vigilance.



AT LENGTH the girl recalled her attention from the distances to her immediate environment. Her gaze dwelt for a moment on the rugged profile of the bronze blond, then roved back to the somewhat morose visage of the red-skinned man behind the engine, who sat with one huge hand on a small steering wheel. On her curving lips grew a smile.

"Why so solemn, my bandit chiefs?" she bantered. "Everything's as peaceful as a Quaker meeting. Where's all that red ruin and rebellion you were predicting down here, Mr. Tiger and Mr. Bull?"

The set faces and tense muscles of the pair momentarily relaxed. But the response of the taller one was not reassuring.

"It's come," he asserted. "The fact that there's nothing to see only proves it. If things were normal there'd have been a *piragua* or two—sailboats, you know—somewhere in sight before now. When there's not even a canoe moving in this section something has broken loose on land."

"Jest about what I was thinkin', Hart," agreed the engineer. "O' course I dunno this here river, seein' I jest come down out o' Colombia; but some way it don't look right or feel right to me. There's people livin' along here, ain't there?"

"Sure. Little plantations scattered all along. You can't see them from midstream because they're tucked away behind the shore timber, but they're there. Poor folks, mostly, who live in palm shacks and just manage to grow enough grub to keep alive."

"Yeah. And they're jest the kind that fall for this revolution stuff when some grafter out of a job stirs 'em up. They've got nothin' to lose but their lives, which ain't worth much, and they think the new guy will give 'em a square deal if he wins out. Poor simps! I bet if we coasted along shore now we wouldn't find an able-bodied man or a decent canoe at any o' them shacks. They're all gone down river somewheres to fight in General Mañana's so-noble army for liberty and justice. Mm-pah!" He spat over the side.

"General Mañana?" echoed the girl. "Is there such a man?"

Hart, the blond, chuckled.

"Manaña's the middle name of all these rebel generals, Jean," he explained. "They're always going to reform things *mañana*—tomorrow—when they've licked the federals. Meanwhile they seize everything in sight and promise to pay for it *mañana*—when they get into office. If you're a rancher they kill your cattle for campaign food and give you an I O U which you can collect *mañana*—only you never do. If you have anything else they want they grab that too. And by the same token they'd seize this launch and our guns if they could get— What? *Què dice,* Pablo?"

"*Derecha,*" repeated the pilot.

The steersman swung the boat to the right, as directed, to follow a new current.

"Kelly's right," resumed Hart. "This part of the river's quiet just now because it's unquiet somewhere else. We may bump into something rough almost any time. Don't want to alarm you, but you might as well know the facts."

Again he scowled along the sunlit expanse of waves. Kelly, too, swept a bleak look along both advancing shores. Then his heavy mouth quirked in a sardonic grin.

"And seein' we're a couple of innocent young fellers that ain't used to associatin' with rough guys, we don't want to meet up with no bad actors," he jested. "If anybody should speak cross to us I bet we'd bust right out cryin', hey, Hart?"

Hart chuckled again. Jean laughed—a clear, ringing laugh that distracted the pilot's attention from his duty and made his mouth stretch in a thin smile, even while his probing glance vainly sought the cause of merriment. He did not understand English.

"Yes, I can just imagine it!" she scoffed. "El Tigre and El Toro whining in concert! The very mention of your names would make most of these Orinoco men dodge into cover."

"Perhaps so—yesterday," conceded Hart. "Yesterday, when Bull and I had our respective gangs behind us. But this is another day, and we're just peaceable sailormen trying to deliver a passenger at Ciudad Bolívar. How's the gas holding out, chief?"

"I dunno, Cap'n. All we got is in the tank. Ingyne ain't showin' no signs o' missin' yet. We might make Caicara before she quits."

Silence again descended. Pablo faced forward, frowning in suspicion. Why could not these *norte americanos* speak in Spanish, so that he could understand? Perhaps they were making some plot behind his back and laughing at him. He did not like it.

Another hour took its leisurely flight. From time to time the distant banks on either hand showed small, vaguely visible gaps where entered side streams, slipping smoothly into the river from the uplands at the right or the prairies at the left. Whatever lurked or swam beyond those unmarked gateways remained unseen by the voyagers.

Still another hour, and the erstwhile empty mouth of one of those *caños* became clogged with floating life. The stealthy serpent of the swamplands had reached the broad waterway where the waves rolled; and, at sight of those heaving hosts, had drawn back its head. Its body shortened and broadened on itself as its hollow sections jammed together. Among its riders passed the word that *el rio grande* was too rough to be crossed now by craft so low-riding and heavy-laden, and that the afternoon calm must be awaited. Wherefore lookouts were posted, and the rest of the armed force devoted itself to loafing and gnawing at tough slabs of sun-cured beef.

To the eyes and the ears of the sentries, the laboring motorboat was nonexistent. Miles downstream, following a near-shore current, it was lost to sight in the dazzling sun-glare and the thin heat-haze; and the soft drumming of its exhaust was deadened by the swash and slap of myriad rollers against the banks. So it passed away unseen and unknown, and behind it a curve of the shore presently crept out, blotting it from even the keenest vision up-river. For that matter, none of the guards even thought to look for such a craft; they peered in both directions for sail or smoke, saw neither, and thereafter stood in semi-somnolence.

Noonday, fiercely hot, held both river and land in its burning grip when all four of the launch-travelers leaned forward. Down ahead had appeared a yellow-gray block of low houses on a slanting shore, behind which rose a steep hill. Pablo turned with a grin and a single word: "Caicara!" Hart and Jean scanned the place narrowly; the man seeking any indication of disorder, the girl peering with interest through the intense sunlight. At the same moment Kelly, his forehead drawn into a scowl, announced—

"Ingyne's missin'!"

The even purr of the motor was breaking into fitful snores, halting as the bow dropped into a trough, spurting again as it tilted up a new wave. Hart, withdrawing his attention from the obviously peaceful town, listened a moment and frowned. Kelly jockeyed with the spark, but the skipping continued. Soon he looked up with a gray gleam under his black brows.

"Miss Rogers, ye might git for'ard and cover up yer ears. There's jest two things that'll make a gas ingyne run—gas and cusswords. The gas is about gone, and we've got to run the next couple o' miles on swearin'. Hart, you come back here and stand by to relieve me when I run out o' words. If ye've got half as much steam in yer language as ye had when me and you was bossin' that hardboiled B company in the A. E. F., we'll make port in a cloud o' blue smoke."

The blond, after another glance downstream and a quizzical look at his fair companion, smiled grimly, arose, and sauntered aft. The girl took one straight survey of the engineer's truculent physiognomy and walked forward.

"Now," rumbled Kelly, jaw out and baleful gaze fixed on the stuttering motor, "now ye —— —— —— and a hop-headed —— horse's neck, what the merry —— d'ye think ye're doin'? Snap into it, ye blitherin' blatherin' ——, or by the jumpin' Judas Christopher Columbus I'll—"

The boat gave a nervous lurch and began to pick up speed.

II

IN THE office of Jaime Gordo, *jefe civil* of Caicara, the glum conference still was going on. From the parched little plaza outside now came virtually no sound; midday heat and hunger had driven all within doors to dine and drowse. It was high time for Don Jaime and his visitors also to stop talking and eat, but the council showed little sign of breaking up. In fact, it was going over the same ground for the twentieth time, as if in wearisome repetition might at last be found the solution to a pressing problem.

"*Válgame Dios!*" groaned the heavy-paunched official, once more mopping his moist face. "Must I talk myself tongueless? The thing should be plain to blind men. There are no troops. I have asked and asked, and no *soldados* have come. Perhaps a garrison is on its way to us, perhaps not. I have done all I can. I can do no more. We can only wait."

"You are the official of the government," obstinately reiterated a fat-cheeked trader, "and it is your duty—"

"To protect you and your money," snapped Don Jaime. "For the love of God, can you not even change the words of that whine of yours? You repeat it like a parrot! When taxes are due, *maldito*, you have no money! None of you has a *bolívar* then, and the official of the government is a cold-hearted wretch who snatches the crusts from your starving children. But when rebellion sweeps the land and bandits shoot and loot, then you suddenly discover that you possess not only *bolivares* but *morrocotas*.* And then the inhuman beast of a government official must grow wings and miraculously save you—carry you and your goods up to ride on the clouds, where no man may harm you—or by a greater miracle create an army to defend you! *Por Dios!* From where shall I make this army to come? Shall I spit on the ground and cause riflemen to leap from it, or sneeze into the air and turn the spray of my nose into cavalry?"

"Nevertheless something must be done," insisted an undersized merchant in not-too-recently laundered ducks, "before those *guapos* who attacked San Fernando de Apure can reach this city. They may be within a league of us even now—"

**Bolivar*—twenty cents. *Morrocota—twenty dollars.*

"And the federal garrison which I have asked from Ciudad Bolívar may be landing at the port at this moment," sarcastically retorted the chief. "One is as likely as the other. I tell you again, and for the last time, that we can do nothing at all but wait for whatever may come. If the soldiers of the President come it is well. If raiders come—then every man must do what he can for himself."

A sour silence. Then a man sitting near an iron-grilled window cocked an ear toward the plaza.

"Something comes at this moment," he announced, "and in haste."

All tensed. In the stillness of the square sounded the rapid slip-slaps of a single pair of *alpargatas* speeding along the narrow flagstones forming a sidewalk. A man running at this broiling hour!

Slip-slap, slip-slap, slip-slap; hoarse breathing; then, at the Gordo door, a panting voice—

"Don Jaime! Where is he? I have news—"

"Back, *hombre!*" sounded the growl of a Gordo peon posted on guard. "Don Jaime is not to be seen. Give your news to me."

"But they are coming! They have landed and even now are—"

With speed astonishing in so heavy a man, the *jefe civil* heaved himself erect. The merchants sprang up as if kicked, their eyes darting about in panic.

"Ramon!" sharply called the chief. "Pass the man in! At once!"

"*Sí, señor!* Go in, you!"

A slither of soles. Into the office popped a sinewy riverman, his sweaty face alive with excitement.

"Señor Don Jaime! I bring news from the river! I was down in the shade of a tree and mending a sail when I heard a strange noise, a noise one does not often hear upon this Orinoco, but I knew at once what it was—I know all noises of all boats, *crra!*—and I said to myself, '*Ajo,* now here comes a boat of Bolívar, having in it an engine of gasoline, and I think it is the *lancha* of—"

"*Cállese!* Hold your tongue!" roared Gordo. "Who has landed?"

The garrulous newsmonger gulped, scowled, then responded—

"The North American señorita who with her father and a crew from Bolívar passed up the river in a *lancha* not many days ago."

Vast relief overspread every countenance. Don Jaime, after a speechless moment, sank back in his chair.

"*Bueno!*" he muttered. "That is good. They have turned back and will be more safe—perhaps." Then, brow darkening and voice rising, he demanded, "And you come blundering in like a crazy bull and upset a conference of señores only to tell us that a young woman has arrived? You fish-mouthed fool! Get out!"

"But no, Don Jaime, no! There is more to tell. Of all those who went up with her, only she comes back! All the men are gone! And with her are new men with guns!"

At that the señores started. Sudden anxiety again contracted their faces.

"How many?" snapped the chief.

"Three. One of them is Pablo Benito, who has charge of the cart road around the rapids at Atures—"

The informer paused, eyes glistening as he watched relief dawn again upon these high and mighty gentlemen. Order him out, would they? Watch them jump when he dropped his bomb!

"And Pablo comes this way now with the señorita. Another man, big and ugly, with a rifle and a revolver, stays in the launch. I do not know that one. And the third man comes with Pablo and the woman. And he is—"

Another dramatic pause. He seemed listening toward the plaza.

"*Sí, sí,*" prompted Gordo. "And he is—"

"He is a man I saw once on the river above the rapids and ran away from, as I shall run now. He is the blond *guapo*, the *bandido*—the desperado, the bandit, the killer of killers—El Tigre!"

Dead silence. Jaws dropped, cheeks paled, cold sweat seemed to ooze from every brow. Outside sounded soft footfalls coming nearer, growing more audible, treading with purposeful strides.

"*Adios, señores!*" breathed the riverman, with a mocking glint of teeth.

And he fled into the patio at the rear, scrambled up a small *sarrapia* tree, swung to the top of a wall, and dropped outside the premises of Gordo.

"*Ajo!*" croaked one of the conferees. "So it has come! El Tigre and his band are upon us! All the raiders in all the world must be swarming together at the west, for never before has that blond one struck so far from his own region."

"But this man of the river said there were three men only—" began another.

"Idiot! More of them, many more, must be close behind these three. This Tigre has captured the señorita and killed her men and seized her launch and come before the rest to—"

"Ssss! *Silencio!*" warned Gordo. "They enter."

Outside sounded a curt, cold voice.

"*Muchacho!* Your master is within? *Bien.* Stand aside!"

A slight shuffle of feet, as the erstwhile arrogant peon betook himself hastily from the path of the dominant newcomer. In the doorway of the office loomed the tall Hart.

A MOMENT he stood there, sweeping the uneasy assemblage with sardonic gaze; noting how swiftly they spied his crippled arm, and how speedily they also absorbed the fact that his other hand, hanging low, was ready for swift movement. A thin smile flitted over his lips. Coolly he advanced another pace or two, making room for his companions to follow. Beside him appeared the boyish lady of the launch, glancing amusedly at the perturbed townsmen, and the unarmed Pablo, squinting shrewdly from under the drooping brim of his peaked sombrero.

Another short interval of silence, while the Caicaran physiognomies became a trifle perplexed. These two presumptive prisoners of the terrible Tigre did not exhibit such nervousness as should logically be expected. Their expressions were not strained, their attitudes not indicative of anxiety. On the contrary, the boy-girl who so nonchalantly wore breeches seemed entirely at ease; and Pablo Benito, although somewhat deferential in poise, did not appear worried. Inasmuch as Pablo was known to be far from bold or brave, his present serenity in the company of a noted outlaw was in itself mystifying.

"*Buenos tardes.* Good afternoon," spoke Gordo, assuming official formality. "In what way may I have the honor of serving you?"

"Gasoline," laconically replied Hart.

Gordo blinked. The first thing a raider should ask for was government gold.

"Gasoline?" he returned. "But—but I have no gasoline, señor. I am not a merchant. Do you mean that you desire the usual government permit to purchase gasoline?"

"Hardly. I issue my own permits. You will give an order for gasoline, to be paid for at Bolívar."

Every one blinked this time; every one but the newcomers. To be paid for at Bolívar! Paid for! And at Bolívar—where federal forces would joyously stand this Tigre against a wall! Was the man *loco?*

The blue eyes watching them twinkled. Suddenly, but silently, the raider laughed; baring his teeth with the abruptness of a jaguar showing its fangs, but in mirth instead of menace. His gaze still held them, however, reading their changing expressions. All at once his merriment ceased.

"Who am I?" he demanded.

"El Tigre!" blurted some one.

"Ah. You know me. And how? I have not been here before."

"All the world knows the famous Tigre," flattered another trader. "Have we not heard for years of the mighty fighter with hair of gold who shot with both hands and—" He paused, involuntarily glancing at the useless left arm; then, as if fearful that his look might give offence, began to rattle on again. But Hart stopped him.

"And who still can shoot, if necessary," he crisply reminded. "But El Tigre now will shoot only if necessary. I escort this señorita down the river to safety, and we come and go in peace—unless some one wants trouble."

"Trouble? *Válgame Dios*, nobody here desires it!" ejaculated Gordo. "Too much trouble already rides abroad! And—and your men then will not molest our city, señor?"

"No danger. They are many miles from here. I have left them."

"Left them? Ah! You mean that you go to Bolívar to surrender yourself? And no other *guapos*—pardon, I mean no other *revolucionarios*—come after you?"

Hart made no reply. He stood narrowly watching the official, into whose fat face had leaped an odd light. Then spoke the girl.

"Señor Hart, whom you call El Tigre, is no longer a revolutionist," she calmly declared. "He is a North American—like myself—who has seen enough of this country—like myself—and is leaving it—like myself. He has traveled with me from Atures as escort and bodyguard, and we go to Bolívar to take the steamer for Trinidad."

Every countenance before her betrayed amazed incredulity. Yet all seemed somewhat impressed by her cool composure. In the same quiet tone she went on:

"You remember, of course, Señor Gordo, that I am Jean Rogers, of the United States, and that I recently went up the river with my father, who meant to explore above the rapids. He is dead. At Zamuro the men of the crew vexed him, and—his heart was not strong, and—it stopped. Then the crew deserted me and went away; I do not know where. I walked to Atures, where Señor Benito gave me shelter. Then Señor Hart appeared; and, because he had heard that disturbances might break out at this time, he came with me down the river.

"You remember also, of course, that I have the passport of the President of Venezuela and the order of General Perez, governor of this State, commanding all officials to assist my voyage in every way possible. I now am in need of gasoline. I have no money here—the men of the crew took it—but we left funds in bank at Ciudad Bolívar, and when I arrive there I can pay well for the fuel and food obtained here. So I ask you to give us twenty gallons of gasoline and enough food to enable us to finish our journey."

For a moment after she ceased speaking no answer came. The merchants stared. Her story rang true enough, except that the explanation of the presence of El Tigre still seemed a bit improbable; and her request for assistance was altogether natural. It was her concise way of going straight to the point, her confident air, her direct gaze and assured tone, that made them watch her in wonder. *En verdad*, this slim young man-woman was a man in speech as well as in dress! A fit companion for the straight-shooting Tigre, *caramba!* More than one eye went to her belt, as if half expecting to find there a revolver-butt.

Similar thoughts streaked through the mind of the *jefe civil*, to be instantly displaced by others more weighty. On occasion, his brain was far more nimble than his fat face would indicate; and this was such an occasion. After a barely perceptible hesitation he bowed with pompous dignity.

"Most assuredly, señorita," he suavely acquiesced. "My services are entirely at your command. You shall be my guest—you and your companions—for as long as you care to honor my poor house. Even now dinner waits; and thereafter you shall rest. In the meantime—"

"In the meantime we are going," broke in Hart. "We eat on the river and rest in our boat. Let the gasoline be furnished *pronto*."

"So? You will not stay? It is a pity. But now—the gasoline. It is possible that some of it is in a locked room at the rear, held there for payment of taxes. I am not sure. But I shall look. A moment."

With another bow he excused himself, sidling out through a doorway into a dusky corridor.

"No tricks!" warned Hart.

"Tricks? Assuredly not, *amigo!* For what should I play tricks?"

His footsteps receded. El Tigre looked after him suspiciously; then, with a contemptuous smile, turned his attention back to the group of business men. Watching them, he spoke aside to Jean.

"If you'd like to eat dinner here it'll be all right, I guess. I'll wait and eat mine after we get to going. But your food wouldn't be doctored."

"Doctored?" Her eyes widened. "Do you think they'd poison yours? Oh, I don't believe it!"

"I hardly think so myself, but still—I've been in this country long enough to be superstitious about some things. And my appetite's not so good just now."

"Neither is mine. I think things would taste better in the open air."

He smiled slightly, but said no more. Minutes dragged away, each growing longer. Once more Hart began to look toward the corridor, his lids narrowing. But then came the sound of returning feet, and soon the *jefe civil* reappeared, perspiring profusely.

"I have made a sad blunder," he mourned. "The tins of gasoline are not of gasoline but of kerosene. But it does not matter. There is gasoline at the shop of Señor Morales—is it not so, Morales? *Bien.* Then let your *muchachos* carry to the boat of the señorita the twenty gallons requested. I shall write the order later. And you, Señor Paez, shall send from your *tienda* the best food you have. You others, go! There is no more to be said regarding the matter we have discussed, and I wish to speak in private with these new guests. *Vaya!*"

A pudgy hand waved in imperious command. The mute group moved with alacrity doorward, glad of the opportunity to remove themselves from such close proximity to the erstwhile bandit. It might be true that he had reformed, but it was also possible that he might backslide without warning. So they shuffled ahead, and the Tiger and his companions stepped carelessly aside to let them pass, meanwhile watching them go.

Then, while the blond man's head was momentarily turned away from Gordo, that worthy gentleman emitted a slight cough. Instantly a wiry young peon glided through the darksome doorway at the rear. His right hand swung up—back—shot forward with the speed of a striking catapult. Like a bullet a smooth stone darted through the air. And like a man shot down in his tracks El Tigre toppled, pitched sidewise, and lay senseless on the tiled floor.

With a triumphant squall Gordo threw himself forward; stooped, snatched the unconscious man's revolver from its holster, and arose grinning.

"The orders are changed," he gurgled. "Señores, the gasoline and food need not be sent to the port; at least, not yet. The señorita has decided to dine and rest here for a time. As for this so impatient *guapo* who now enjoys siesta on my floor—Ramon! Claudio! Remove this yellow-haired dog and throw him into the jail!"

III

"YOU snake!"

Low-toned, but vibrant with anger and edged with contempt, the swift words cut like a knife through the chuckling complacency of the *jefe civil*. The grin vanished from his thick lips, and for a second he stood peering into the blazing eyes of Jean. The next instant he was dodging and ducking to retain his possession of the captured Colt. She had sprung at him like a fury, snatching for the revolver and at the same time beating his astonished face with a small but stinging fist.

Scrambling, stumbling, and awkwardly covering himself with his free hand, he wobbled about the place, managing somehow to keep his grip on the weapon until, by a clumsy stiff-armed shove, he sent her staggering back against the table. Thereupon he jabbed the gun inside his tight waistband at the back and stood ready to clutch her, if she renewed the attack. Seeing the futility of further exertion, however, she held her distance.

"*Válgame Dios!*" he panted. "It rains tiger-cats!"

A snicker ran through the cluster of tradesmen at the door. It roused the dignitary to realization of the fact that his dignity was tottering toward an ignominious fall. Gone was the heroic crown which he had just placed on his own head by the capture of the fearsome Tiger. Now the whole town would bubble with hilarity over the tale that Don Jaime Gordo had cavorted about his office like a dancing bear while a girl in pants punched his nose. Worse yet, the story would travel all along the river, and for years to come he might be known as "Oso" Gordo—Fat Bear.

Wherefore he put down his foot with vindictive force. On all and sundry he bent a baleful glare; on the censorious señorita, on the maliciously grinning merchants, on his own staring retainers and on Pablo Benito, who had made no move to interfere. And on all of them he loosed a savage roar.

"You, young woman, stand where you are! You will attack the Venezuelan government, will you? We shall see! You grinning apes—you braying burros who were so noisy before the coming of El Tigre and so dumb afterward—get back to your miserable shops! Or get home and squawk to your women to protect you! Ramon—Claudio—you offspring of Indian she-dogs, obey my command and dump this carrion into the *cárcel!* You, Pablo Benito, you traitorous friend of *guapos*, are under arrest! Move one step without my permission and I will execute you with your master's weapon!"

Pablo quaked. The peons hastily seized the prone American. The tradesmen lost their mirth in a trice. Only the girl dared answer.

"You will go to jail yourself, you blustering coward! This man is my escort, and as soon as General Perez hears of this thing—"

"Silence! General Perez will shoot him and reward me for my bravery. The passport he granted your party was never meant to protect an outlaw, an enemy of the republic. That order was for your crew of Bolívar—honest men—"

A scornful laugh cut him short.

"Honest men—who caused the death of my father and stole my money! Honest men like you, who strike from behind! Treacherous sneaks! If you and they are honest men I prefer the society of outlaws!"

Gordo stuttered with rage. The revolver half rose to an aim. Then it sank again, and he swallowed hard. The taunt had pierced even more deeply than the girl knew, for a reason of which she was unaware. The others in the room, cognizant of matters beyond her ken, looked at the furious chief and the revolver, then began hastily moving outward—all but Benito, who dared not move at all.

Borne by the peons, the long, limp form of Hart was hustled through the doorway and out toward the plaza and the waiting prison. The departing townsmen shuffled along beside him, not to scatter until they had seen the erstwhile terror securely locked behind thick walls and iron bars. One of them, though, halted and called:

"Don Jaime! What shall be done with the other armed man in the *lancha?*"

The chief blinked. He had temporarily forgotten that other man. A man large and ugly, with revolver and rifle! Most certainly, something must be done about that one. For the moment, however, he evaded the question.

"Let him sit and stew until I issue further orders," he temporized. "And let no man talk with him. Any man who does so, I promise you, shall rot in jail until his bones fall apart. I shall attend to the stranger when I am ready. First I will eat dinner."

Several chuckles sounded as the men proceeded. Don Jaime was a cool one, *caramba!* And he knew what he was about; no question of that. So they would leave matters in his hands, and most assuredly they would keep away from that ugly one in the launch.

The worthy Don Jaime, listening to their departure, felt that he had regained his grip. Once more he was the big man of the town, and he meant to remain so. Wherefore he turned on the young woman a heavy frown and on Pablo Benito a malevolent scowl.

"Now, traitor!" he rumbled. "Tell the truth of this thing, or you shall curse the day of your birth! The country is at war, and you know the fate of rebels."

"Señor—Don Jaime—I am no traitor, no, no!" protested the scared Pablo. "I knew nothing of war—the news had not come to my *rancho*—and I only sought to convey this unfortunate señorita in safety back to Bolívar. It is just as she has told you. And that accursed Tigre—ah, how nobly you overcame him, señor!—he forced himself on us and—"

"Oh, what a lie!" flared Jean. "He came only because I urged him—because I felt that you could not be trusted! You are another of those 'honest men'!"

"Silence!" boomed the *jefe civil.* "I am conducting this examination! And from where did this Tigre come, *hombre?*"

"From his land above the rapids, señor, where he and his *guapos* long have ridden and raided. He had a fight with them—*sí*, with his own men, the bloodthirsty one!—and I myself saw four of them dead by his hand; they fought at Salvajito, above my place. And he came to my house wounded, and I—I had to take him in, because he had his gun and most certainly would have killed me otherwise. The señorita had come but a little time before him. And—yes, señor, she did ask him to come with us—it was not my fault. So then we came down the river; and I said to myself, 'Pablo, you shall see to it that the infamous *guapo* shall be caught by the government—perhaps at Caicara.' And because you are a bold and resolute man, Don Jaime, he was caught even as I had planned. Do you not see that if I had not brought him to you, señor, you never would have captured him? And—and is there perhaps a reward for him? I am a poor man, and—"

"Humph! If there is a reward you get none of it, you fool! You have just said that you did not bring him willingly. I, Jaime Gordo, captured him! No more words! But now, who is the other one?"

"The man in the *lancha?* He also is a most infamous brigand, but of Colombia; and his name is Kay-lee, or so these Americanos call him; but here he is called El Toro, the Bull. This Toro and his band of wild ones were at the mouth of the Meta river, and they captured us. But it seems that both El Tigre and El Toro had been in the great war in France and remembered each other well, and after they had talked El Toro deserted his band and came with us. And he is most savage, señor, and one must be very careful toward him."

The Gordo scowl became a frown of thought. Soon, however, his face lightened.

"The matter of his capture is easily arranged," he declared, with a self-satisfied smirk. "It is as easy as that of El Tigre;

as easy as it was to make sure that no army of *revolucionarios* followed the launch. I had only to climb to the roof and see that the river was empty of all other boats, and then climb down and give an order to my peon Claudio, who is most clever at throwing a stone; and, *presto!* the thing was done. And I know how this shall be done as easily. But— You say this Toro is of Colombia, not of Venezuela. That makes it a different matter. The government of Venezuela does not build prisons to accommodate criminals of Colombia."

Pablo stood mute for a moment, furtively probing the other's expression. Then he ventured:

"I heard it said, señor, while I was in the camp of that Toro, that he and his men had come to join in the revolution for the sake of plunder. And all of them are rascals and men without a country. So—"

He paused. Gordo grinned with satisfaction.

"Ah! That gives the matter still another face. He brought armed men to ravage our country. And he himself comes here with weapons in his hands— *Sí*, it is an act of war! *Bien.* Pablo, you are a faithful citizen. I am well pleased with you. Now you shall perform a small service for your country—one which is not dangerous, Pablo—and all shall be well with you hereafter. I shall tell you presently the thing to be done."

"Anything, señor, anything!" eagerly assented the pilot. "Anything not too risky. I have a family—a wife and little *niños*—"

"You shall see them again, *hombre*—if you prove worthy." The chief's tone had suddenly become affable, and his threatening attitude was gone. Once more sauve, he addressed the girl.

"I regret, señorita, the necessity of being so brusk in this matter; but in time of rebellion one must do one's duty. Be assured that you shall not be inconvenienced by the loss of these two men. Others shall take their places, and the boat shall proceed—"

"I refuse to travel with any other men." Though her eyes still smoldered, her tone was coldly repressed. "I choose my own crew. And I warn you that this high-handed action of yours will be reported to your President at Caracas and, if necessary, to the American Department of State. Both Señor Hart and Señor Kelly are American citizens and former soldiers. They have made no attack on your town or on you, and you have no right to attack them. Neither have you any right to interfere with my voyage or to put any other men in my boat. You will be—"

"The boat, señorita, is not yours. I recall that you leased it from Guillermo la Torre, of Ciudad Bolívar, who is a citizen of Venezuela. In time of disorder any Venezuelan boats useful to federal authorities can be summarily taken over for government use. I have in mind an exceedingly important use for that launch. But it will not interfere with your journey. The boat will proceed to Ciudad Bolívar very soon, and you shall have ample protection and all courtesy, for I myself shall ride with you. It is necessary to consult with General Perez regarding a question of troops, and— But first there is a more immediate matter. Pablo! Come here!"

He stepped back toward the entrance, Pablo obediently following. A low mumble of words, with an undernote of threat, poured into the pilot's ear. The latter looked uneasy, but gave a comprehending nod. As he accepted his instructions, outside sounded the slither of returning alpargatas.

"Ah, Ramon! The Tigre is safe in his kennel?" asked Gordo. "*Bien.* Now do this thing at once: Go to Señor Morales and give him my command to send to the launch several cans of gasoline and other things,—it does not matter what they are. Several men must go, and also this man and Claudio. And at the launch—"

Another rapid mumble, followed by a stolid "*Sí, señor.*" The peon once more departed, and with him went the trusty pilot. The stout gentleman chuckled and mopped his brow, turning again to his unwilling guest. Then his jaw dropped. With a heavy lurch he threw himself toward the patio.

The señorita had vanished from the office. Out in the yard, she was drawing herself up into the *sarrapia* tree which formed an exit over the wall.

At his best speed Gordo pounded to the tree and clutched at an ascending ankle. It evaded him. As he staggered to recover balance the agile girl attained a footing on the first low branch and reached for a new hand-hold. A few seconds more, and she would be on the wall and beyond capture.

Gritting his teeth, the chief jumped, seized the branch with both hands, and yanked with his whole weight.

The branch broke. The fugitive fell.

GORDO went down in an obese huddle, the overthrown girl landing on him like a tumbling wildcat. Her fingers fastened in his thick black hair and her booted feet kicked furiously at his shins.

"Ow-wow!" groaned the dignitary of Caicara, hastily squirming aside from the punishing boots. *"Santa Maria! Madre de Dios! Maldito!* Stop it!"

The response was a wrench at his overlong hair which brought tears drizzling down his cheeks. Then a hand darted to his belt, feeling for the gun jammed under it. Just in time he grabbed that hand, dragging it away. Thereafter he sank his fingers deep into the other girlish forearm, benumbing it and breaking her grip on his disheveled hair. Heaving himself up, he lifted her and held her helpless—although still fiery and unsubdued—in the inescapable grasp of both his arms, and hobbled painfully but purposefully toward a bolted door.

"You—you fathead!" she panted, vainly struggling. "Put me down!"

He plowed ahead without reply. Reaching the door, he managed to draw the bolt. Through the portal he thrust her into a small bare room, lighted only by an iron-grilled window opening on the patio. The door slammed shut and the bolt clattered home. At the window he peered in with a mirthless smile.

"As you say, señorita," he smirked. "I have put you down as you request. You will find this an excellent place in which to grow cool; it is not wise to become overheated. I regret that you will not join me at the table, but the best food in my poor house shall come to you soon—through this window—and before long you shall be given a more comfortable room. No, oh no, you are not under arrest; you are only detained a short time as a measure of safety. Compose yourself and rest."

With an ironic bow he moved away. Jean shoved at the door, shook the bars, gazed about at the blank walls—and suddenly sank beside the window and wept; her will exhausted by the strain of the day's excitement.

IV

PABLO BENITO, faithful citizen, having performed the small service for his country recently imposed on him as conclusive proof of loyalty, squatted in a dark corner and nervously washed his hands with perspiring palms.

The motion was involuntary, but incessant; prompted, perhaps, by a subconscious yearning to cleanse himself of participation in the trickery of the *jefe civil.* For the aforesaid *jefe* was not a noble, bold, resolute hero and an illustrious *caballero*, after all; he was a mean, sneaking, underhanded liar, an oily hypocrite, a slimy serpent—in short, utterly despicable. He had permitted—indeed, must have surreptitiously commanded—that Pablo, the valiant patriot who at great risk to himself had performed a notable deed in capturing two dreaded *guapos*, be locked up in the same jail with those same desperadoes. And now, with the terrible Tigre and the man-slaying Toro likely to regain their senses at any moment—he fidgeted and squirmed, while, despite the oven-like heat of the mud pen, the sweat trickling down his back ran cold.

The scheme of the wily Gordo had worked out to perfection. Carrying the expected gasoline and several *bultos* of cassava, a small procession of peons had gone to the port, accompanied by Pablo and Claudio the stone-thrower. In answer to Kelly's growling question as to the whereabouts of his two companions, Pablo had glibly declared that they still were selecting supplies, but would return *pronto.* After a sharp look at the weaponless, expressionless *mestizos*, El Toro had stood at ease, bossing the stowage of the cans and the leaf-wrapped bundles. Then Claudio had silently cast his stone. Thereafter there was nothing to do but to carry the supplies back to the shops and transport the fallen man to the jail.

Pablo, having no other burden to bear, had—by request—assisted Ramon and Claudio in their allotted task of portaging the heavy body. They had maneuvered him into entering the lock-up first. A sudden shove, a mocking laugh, a thud as the door shut; and Pablo had scrambled from under Kelly's dead weight to find himself imprisoned. Poundings and pleadings and promises had brought in response only guffaws and ribald advice as to the most pleasant way of passing his time. Ah, what a vile, treacherous nest of snakes was this town of Caicara! And what a horrible hole was this in which to imprison an honest man!

The honest man now had been confined in the horrible hole for perhaps a quarter of an hour. In that time, however, he had lived at least half a day. The first five minutes had gone in howls for release and in a futile eye-search for any possible line of escape. The adobe walls were solid, the floor of immovable stone, the two high windows heavily barred and too small for even a child to squirm through. Wherefore the ensuing time had been devoted to miserable cogitation, the while his panicky gaze remained glued to the senseless Americanos. What would they do to him when they revived? *Caramba*, what would they not do? Although one was a cripple and both were disarmed, he felt that when they finished with him he would resemble nothing human.

All at once his hand-massage halted. A quick light flitted across his face. From his hunched position he started up as if jabbed by a scorpion. His glance darted to the hard wall, switched to the recumbent forms, returned to the adobe, hung there. He stepped away a couple of paces; clenched his fists in desperate resolution; and suddenly, with head lowered, launched himself against the unyielding barrier.

The shock stunned him, as he well knew it would. He crumpled to the dirty floor. For a few minutes he lay there motionless; not totally unconscious, but dazed, and feeling but vaguely the burn of the resultant contusion. Then his brain cleared, and at once his hands rose to explore his scalp. As the fingers pressed his crown he winced; but into his recently troubled visage came a look of relief—almost of peace. Under his ebon hair was mushrooming a large bump.

Without rising, he awaited with newfound serenity the recovery of his companions. At length the long Tigre, lying flat on his back, opened his eyes and stared blankly at the roof; lifted his head, scowling as a stab of pain streaked through it, but swiftly surveying his surroundings; then started up to a sit, his hand sliding at once to his holster. A blacker scowl creased his brow as he found the leather scabbard empty. He fixed a dire gaze on the Venezuelan.

Thereupon Pablo, watching through his lashes, allowed his lids to rise; squinted with feigned amazement at El Tigre, El Toro, and the yellow walls; shoved himself up, groaned, and clasped his head.

"*Ajo!* Where are we, señor?"

Hart made no answer. His narrow gaze bored into the pilot's eyes until the latter began to quake again. Then Kelly voiced a grunting groan, rolled over, reeled up and glowered about him. Pablo shrank back as the hard eyes of the Bull also fastened on him.

"Ah, the vile snakes—they have thrown us into prison!" he bleated, once more wincing as he rubbed his bruise. "*Cra!* My head is broken!" And with that, unable longer to meet that double glare, he sank back and wrapped both arms around his head.

A minute or two of ominous silence. Hart and Kelly looked at each other, both involuntarily passing hands through their hair and feeling the huge swellings left there by the stone of Claudio. Abruptly Kelly strode across to the supine guide, stooped, wrenched his arms away, and clawed rough fingers over his scalp. Pablo yelped and strove to wriggle aside.

"Uh-huh," rumbled the Bull. "He got slugged, all right. But there's somethin' fishy here, at that. Hart, did you send this guy down with gas and grub?"

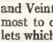
"No. I got knocked out in the *jefe's* office. Somebody crowned me from behind." The hard jaw set harder, and El Tigre got to his feet. "And the only man within arm's length of me at that minute was this sneak! Pablo, you crooked—"

"*Santisima Maria!* It was not I who did it!" squealed Pablo, scrambling into a corner. "For what should I strike you, and with what should I strike? I had no weapon, you know it! The foul deed was done by that doubly foul Jaime Gordo! He had a treacherous scoundrel of a peon throw a stone, señor—a wicked stone that flew from a doorway behind us. And the instant you fell he—Gordo—sprang upon you and snatched your revolver and thrust it into my face as I leaped to aid you! *Sí!* In another second I should have avenged you most bloodily! But the filthy wretch held me at the point of death while all the rest leaped upon me, and I could do nothing. All the world was against me, señor, and I with not so much as a stick in my hands! And so they carried you out, and the traitor still held me at bay, and—what could I do against such a *guapo* as he? If he were a mere official from Caracas— But that *bandido*, that killer, that turncoat who shot his own brother—"

He ran out of breath and paused an instant to gasp. Hart gave a snort.

"*Bandido?* That fat toad?"

"But yes, *compañero!* Of a truth! He is fat now, fat of body as of name, but he was thin enough three years ago. Have you not heard? He is brother to Federico Gordo, the daring *revolucionario*—the one who is called Veinte Cuatro. And with Veinte Cuatro and his fellows Jaime used to ride and fight the government. But the two quarreled over something, and Jaime sneaked off and gave himself up and told to the federals the plans of his brother for the next attack. And at that attack the *revolucionarios* were beaten and many were killed and the rest must ride for their lives, and Veinte Cuatro himself was wounded almost to death, and it is said that the bullets which made those wounds were fired by Jaime! *Sí!* He is that kind of man, señores; he now would murder his own father if he thought it would please the higher officials. A fawning slave of the government, he is. So the government made him *jefe civil* at Mapire, and later he was sent here. *Cra!* We are lucky to be still living!"



HART and Kelly glanced again at each other. This part, at least, of Pablo's yarn rang true. Both had heard of the rebel leader Veinte Cuatro, who was so called for two reasons; because he was big, black-eyed, and fierce in attack, thus bearing some resemblance to the huge black *veinte cuatro* ant; and because, in attacking a town, he invariably completed his operations and was gone within twenty-four hours.* They had heard also of a deadly hatred between him and a brother, but the identity of that brother had escaped them. As for the appointment of a former rebel to a minor government post, that was by no means a new thing in the Venezuelan hinterland; and, more often than not, such an official proved intensely loyal, just as a reformed profligate may become a zealous evangelist.

"And then, señores," Pablo rushed on, "some things were said between the misborn Gordo and the other men which I did not hear. And you will remember, Señor Tigre, that he had ordered gasoline to be taken to the *lancha*. Do you not recall it?" Hart nodded. "And he said again, 'Let those things be carried to the port, and I myself shall escort this señorita to Bolívar. And you, Pablo, go with the peons, but say nothing, or you shall die a thousand times!' And so I went, thinking, 'I will warn the Señor Toro, and we shall free El Tigre.' But on the way a peon said to me, '*Hombre*, open your mouth to that man in the boat and I will cut out your heart,' and he tapped a long knife inside his breeches. So I could only speak as I did, Señor Toro, telling you the others would come soon; but I was watching for my chance to give you a signal or to seize that murderous peon and shout to you the truth. And then, *caramba*, we should have made these sons of dogs run howling to the wilderness! But all at once—*pam!* you fell, and—*pam!*—something struck me also, and I knew nothing. Nothing, *amigos*, until I came awake and saw where we are now—in this horrible jail. Ah, *diablo*, my head!"

Once more he wrapped his arms over his cranium, affecting a pain which he did not feel. Once more Hart and Kelly looked at each other, this time dubiously. How much of truth and how much of falsehood was in this tale? Neither of them believed the fellow's rant regarding his intention to fight for the fallen Tigre; and both were suspicious of the rest of his story. Yet the facts that he was imprisoned with them and that he bore indisputable evidence of a blow weighed heavily in his favor.

"Wal," growled Kelly, "we're here, and there ain't no use in scrappin' amongst ourselves. But lemme tell ye, Pablo, we're goin' to check up on your yarn, and if ye've been givin' us a line o' bull ye'll wish—" He paused; then repeated in Spanish. The veracious pilot began to suffer new chills.

"*Ajo!* You would not believe the lies told you by these Caicarans, señor!" he protested. "They would tell you most outrageous falsehoods! They are misbegotten creatures born in sin and bred in treachery—"

"Never mind that!" broke in Hart. "What of the señorita? What did she do?"

"She? Do? Nothing! She is no strong

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* The *veinte cuatro*—twenty-four—ant is thus named in Venezuela because its venomous bite causes pain, and sometimes fever, lasting 24 hours. In Brazil it is called *tucandeira*.

man like us, *amigo*—a frail woman, hardly more than a child—and she could do nothing, of course. She was at the office as I left, saying nothing at all."

"You lie! She's not the kind that wilts. I'll gamble that she had something to say—"

"Ah! True, señor—my head aches so hard that I was forgetting. She told Gordo that you were Americanos and he had no right to attack you, and he must not interfere with her voyage or her boat. He said it was not her boat, and he would use it himself to go to Bolívar, and she should go with him."

"Huh! So that's the lay!" Kelly nodded understandingly. "This guy Gordo is goin' to beat it to safer country. He takes her along because he dasn't treat her rough; he'd git himself in Dutch with the governor if he didn't use her right. And us guys either go along in chains or stay here and rot in the *calabozo*. Must be somethin' stirrin' round here that he's got wind of, and he wants to do a quick fade-out. But he's S. O. L. The transport's clean out o' commission."

"How?"

With a grim smile, the engineer drew from a trousers pocket a small section of greenish-yellow metal. Hart peered at it in puzzlement.

"The switch," enlightened the other. "It ain't been workin' right; all dirty, see? So while I was waitin' I disconnected the battery and took off this here little arm to scrape it clean. Then the gas parade showed up and I shoved this in my pocket for the time bein'. And until it's put back in place all the gas in the world'll never move that tub; no ignition. And there's only one guy can put it back right, and that's me. So Mister Jaime Gordo will stay right here in town till I git to talk to him—and a long time after that, too. Here's another little thing I've got that he don't know about."

His big right hand slid inside his half-buttoned shirt and emerged gripping a short but heavy-calibered Colt.

"A handy little tool that I carry under me arm for accident insurance," he grinned. "It's got me out o' more than one hole. Half the time these guys down here don't frisk a feller clean; they take off his outside artillery and think they got it all. And betwixt this misplaced switch and this masked battery—Pablo, how would you like to be Jefe Gordo?"

The gun darted to an aim, gaping straight at Pablo's right eye. And that valiant warrior, who had understood only the last few words, arose with a wild yell.

"*Dios mío!* Do not shoot! Put away the gun, señor! Have mercy! I am a poor—"

"Aw, shut up!" Kelly scowled fiercely, sliding the weapon again within his shirt. "Ye howlin' hyena, d'ye want to tell the world about it? Shut your mouth!"

The pallid rascal gulped, cowered, and was silent. His companions turned from him in disgust.

"Slobberin' pup! He's so yeller that if a rabbit kicked him he'd fall dead! Say, Hart, when we git out o' this we'll ditch him. Leave him right here. We don't need him from here on. River's so big now we ain't likely to run aground. What d'ye say?"

"I'm with you. He's crooked as a corkscrew. But when we do get loose, Bull, I want that gun of yours a few minutes. That Gordo sneak is *my* meat!"

"Yeah?" The gray eyes slid to the blond profile, noting the ominous tightness of lips and lids. "Why, now, feller, ye ain't intendin' to git rude with him, are ye? Thought ye'd swore off on that rough stuff, same as me, and was goin' to be a perfect lady."

"I did, and I am—until I get loose."

"Uh-huh." El Toro chuckled softly. "Looks like we'd both backslid since we got religion. Wal, I was leery o' that soft stuff anyway, but I didn't want to argue with the kid. 'You boys are goin' straight now,' she says, 'and ye want to show the officials ye mean it. So don't ye go holdin' up anybody for the gas, but let's git it in the proper way.' And so we tried that proper way, and here we are. Proper ways are all right in their place, but this ain't the place. And as quick as somebody opens that door to slip us our bread and water, blooey goes the proper stuff."

"You said it."

They fell silent, scanning the whole miserable pen. After convincing themselves of its invulnerability they sat down on either side of the single stout door, Hart frowningly pressing his aching shoulder, Kelly glooming at nothing in particular. At the other end, Pablo, avoiding their gaze, alternately congratulated himself on his cleverness and worried over impending possibilities. All three could do nothing but wait.

And then, outside, a loitering listener stole silently away to inform Don Jaime Gordo that he had heard Pablo screaming for mercy and begging one of the *guapos* to put away a gun.

V

A MOONLIGHT, clear and cool, flooded the streets and the patios and the plaza of Caicara with a radiance well-nigh as brilliant as that of the vanished sun. It laved the reddish tile roofs of the low houses, cast sharp-edged shadows under the eaves, and, on eastern walls, traced in inky lines the irregular contours of cracks or spotted with darkness round dents made by forgotten shootings. It streamed through eastern windows, too, spying on sleep or wakefulness, comfort or wretchedness, smiles or scowls or tears. And out on the river it danced along the tops of slumberous little waves, hardly more than ripples, moving gently westward under the playful push of a soft breeze.

Outside the yellow walls, all was peace. Inside some of them, all was not so serene. Within the house of Jaime Gordo, for example, circled conflicting currents of plot and counterplot, none the less intense because of their silence and secrecy. In a hammock in a rear room, whence exit was blocked save by passage through other rooms, lay a girl apparently asleep, but wide awake and fixedly determined to arise and steal forth whenever opportunity should offer; and then, having gained freedom, to open by some as yet unknown means the door of the jail. At his bare council table in his dim-lit office, with streetward shutters closed, a balked and morose official gnawed his fingers and groped mentally for a practicable scheme of flight. Schemes in plenty had wriggled through his brain—snaky ones, all of them—but each armed with fangs which might turn on him. The plan of action which should redound to his own credit stubbornly refused to take shape; and no other would do.

He knew now that the launch was useless. He knew something must have been done to it by one of those brigands now in the *cárcel.* He knew the brigands had a gun. He knew what they would do with it at the first opportunity. So he could not make use of them in starting the boat. He could not even make terms with them; he had tried this by having a note thrown through a window, only to receive in return most disgraceful reflections on his character. Nor could he give them food or drink with certain ingredients slyly mixed therein to render them helpless; for this would involve opening the door. He could do nothing whatever with them; and he could do virtually nothing without them.

Gone was his self-gratulation over his cleverness in trapping those two *guapos.* It had seemed a heaven-sent chance to dodge danger and climb to fame at the same time; to speed down the river to the protection of troops, to pose before the governor as savior of the hapless foreign señorita, to come back to his town with soldiers, deliver to their commander the terrible desperadoes, and see to it that a garrison remained in Caicara—thus exhibiting to the townsmen his zeal for their protection. If by chance the pueblo should be raided in his absence, that could not be his fault; and he would be safe during the raiding. And El Presidente himself should know of the brave capture of El Tigre and El Toro—trust Jaime to attend to that!—and the doughty Gordo might rise in the world as the result. El Presidente liked bold fellows.

But now his ladder to the heights had fallen apart, for the Americans forming its rungs would not remain in place. Worse yet, its collapse seemed exceedingly likely to bring down unpleasant consequences on his head. For one thing, that spiteful señorita meant to make trouble for him at Bolívar; and in all probability she could do so. Now that he reflected, he felt that the powerful General Perez was likely to be wroth over his action in detaining her by force. And in this connection there was another disquieting angle to the affair. If a recent statement of hers was credible, General Perez had empowered her to inform El Tigre that if he would come in peaceably he could leave the country unharmed; and El Tigre was accompanying her under that guarantee of amnesty. In that case, the general would not exactly appreciate the patriotism of Jaime in assaulting and jailing this ex-outlaw. Angrily the thinker told himself that the young woman's statement was untrue; but he could not entirely convince himself of its falsity. If it was true, he had blundered badly. And, true or not, he could not release his prisoners now without grave risk of dire results, both here and hereafter. Neither could he hold them indefinitely. Yet he must do something with them *pronto*. Moreover, he must take some action for the protection of the town—or, at least, of himself and the federal moneys—before some raiding rebel force struck. But what course would bring him triumphant through this tangle of complications? Yes, curse it, what?

At last he gave it up. A night's sleep would refresh his brain. Perhaps in the morning those rogues in the jail, still unfed and unwatered, would be more amenable to his persuasion. Extinguishing the light, he opened the shutter and peered out. All was quiet. Turning, he tiptoed across the patio and listened intently at a window of the room to which, that afternoon, he had transferred the recalcitrant señorita. Faint, regular breathing stole to his ears. He nodded and took his ponderous but noiseless way to his own room; yawned hugely, imbibed a generous nightcap of Maracaibo rum, and turned in.

The moon rolled on its way, widening the shadows of the eaves and narrowing those of the streets. Its beams, imperceptibly changing their slant, crept in at a tiny window of the prison and stole by hairbreadths along the stone floor until they touched the face of a fitfully sleeping Tiger. There they paused a little; then glided on to the loose-jawed but still pugnacious physiognomy of the Bull, snoring on a rough bass note. Other beams, pouring into the patio of Gordo, illumined a face at the bars of Jean's room, where she now knelt to keep track of the moving hands of her little watch. With pulses pounding, but with nerves held under control, she awaited the time when she might venture toward the front of the house. Stillness now reigned; but she knew the wisdom of making certain sure.

At length she arose. More than an hour had passed since the bulky form of Gordo had vanished from her window. In all that time no further indication of wakefulness had come from any part of the place. Everybody must be buried in sleep. She turned to go. But then she halted short, listening. A moment, and she wheeled back to the window.

INTO the quietude of the night had come movement; a vague, formless, virtually soundless movement, intangible, unnamable, felt rather than heard. Had it been louder, it might have been the tread of many soft-stepping feet on the earth; but now it seemed a mere disturbance of air, impacting without shock on alert senses, revealing nothing of its character. Its very strangeness made it weird and alarming. To the taut nerves of the lone girl it suggested a gathering of bodiless spirits—malevolent ghosts of murdered men, perhaps, flocking together for some diabolical purpose. She thrust the unnerving fancy from her, tried to think that perhaps Hart and Kelly and Pablo had broken jail and were stealing to her aid. But something told her that this movement was sinister, deadly dangerous to her as well as to others. Tense, she poised seeking to grasp its meaning.

Steadily, rapidly, it became a trifle more distinguishable, though still only a faint rustling and padding. Now it seemed the purposeful advance of feet up-wind, the sound of their swing and thud swept away behind them by the increasing breeze. Those feet—if feet they were—had come from the direction of the river, bearing their masters in an uncadenced march. Now, somewhere outside the wall of the patio, sounded a low creak like that of a loose flagstone tilting under a weight; and hissing noises and half-heard mumbles, as of whispers and subdued voices—ghost-sounds of ghost-men. These died. Came a long minute of utter silence. And then—

Crrrash! Crack-crack-crack—crrrrash!

"*Yeeee-ah! Veinte Cuatro! Vive. Veinte Cuatro! Jaime Gordo abajo! Muert' al traidor!*"*

The crash of gunfire, the thundering roar of hundreds of voices, burst like a giant shell in the midnight calm. Before its nerve-shattering impact Jean recoiled. A moment later the empty wall became alive with figures scrambling over and dropping into the patio like buccaneers crossing the bulwarks of a captured galleon. And buccaneers they were in their attack—roaring for death and blood, with guns and knives flashing under the moon and eyes and teeth gleaming like those of merciless beasts of prey. Rifles up, they swept the doors and windows with wolfish gaze as they came, ready to shoot down instantly any one loosing a bullet at them. To the shocked vision of the defenceless girl standing back in the shadows they were a hellborn brood devoid of all instincts save those of loot and lust. Frozen, she stood for a few seconds staring at their furious onslaught. Then she dropped to the floor. Swiftly she crept to the window, and under it she pressed herself against the wall.

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*"Long live Veinte Cuatro! Down with Jaime Gordo! Death to the traitor!"

Her door, she knew, was stoutly barred from the inside; she had seen to that before lying down. Through the outcurved iron grille at the window no human eye could detect her in the darkness immediately below. No bullets could penetrate the thick walls, and any fired through the window must pass over her. For the moment she was beyond harm.

Outside reigned bedlam. In the patio reverberated wanton shots, raucous yells, jarring thumps at closed doors. The score of men who had crossed the wall made the noise of a hundred. Farther out, all over the town, hundreds more created a cacophony worthy of a rioting army corps, the tumult of shots and shouts punctuated by the screams of terrified townspeople and the crash of shattering doors and blinds. A veritable hell had broken loose—a hell of noise and fire and fear. The worst of it centered about the house of Jaime Gordo, assaulted from every side by the vindictive force which he once had betrayed to disaster and death, but which now was stronger than ever and rabid for revenge. And Jaime Gordo, awaking to the blood-howl of that swarming horde, lay for long seconds unable to move; paralyzed, petrified, seeing in the darkness the grinning skull and the skeleton fingers of Death.

Yet he did not remain there until that specter closed its freezing hand on him. Out in the plaza blared a bugle ordering cessation of fire; and at once the shooting stopped. The command of that brazen voice also lifted Jaime out of his catalepsy and sent him diving for revolvers—his own and that of El Tigre. The feel of their butts in his palms aroused once more the killing impulse of his bandit days. He crouched at bay, dangerous as a cornered jaguar. The corridor door of his room was open, but he made no move to close it. Instead, he faced the gloomy passage and waited.

The street door broke and swung back. Beyond it thundered a harsh voice:

"Way! Out of my path! Make room for the embrace of brothers!"

"Federico!" breathed Jaime.

A rumbling thud and a sharp crackle drew his darting glance to ash uttered window. It was yielding, battered in by riflebutts. Another blow—the wooden barrier splintered and a panel fell. Faces snarled beyond it. With his right-hand gun he opened fire.

Four times that gun spoke. Four heads slumped downward and were gone. Bullets flew back at him; but he had moved, and they missed in the dark. Now from the corridor banged a loud report, and against the moonlight at the ruined doorway loomed a great black figure. With a hiss Jaime turned loose his left-hand weapon. Streaks of flame slashed the dark. In the corridor blazed answering powder-flares, and the big form came on. Brother against brother, the Gordos were shooting to kill.

More faces had risen to the open window, and through the grille were leveled gunbarrels. But no bullets came. Their general himself now was inside, these men knew, and great was his hunger for vengeance by his own hand. If he killed Jaime, well. If Jaime killed him—*adios*, Jaime, in a volley of lead!

Jaime was a miserable marksman with his left hand, and he knew it. Ignoring his flankers, he now swung his right gun into line with that inexorably advancing figure. Then he staggered, and that revolver fell. Federico had scored in the right shoulder. Jaime gave back toward a corner, shooting again with his remaining weapon. At the answering flash he staggered again and nearly fell. With trembling hand he loosed his last bullet. Once more flame stabbed from the corridor. Jaime quivered under a third impact; reeled backward; was swallowed up in blackness.

At the doorway of the room, huge and terrible in the dimness, Federico Gordo halted, peering about. His own revolver was shot out. He did not reload. Jerking from his belt a long poniard, he waited a moment to locate that vanished betrayer. Was his prey dead? Dying? Lying silent and awaiting his approach? The gloom gave him no answer.

"In the corner, chief!" then called a window watcher. "At the left! It was there he last shot—"

"Fool! Do I not know it? Jaime! You slime, you spittle, you worm of a dunghill, crawl to me on your belly and lick my feet while I tear out your bowels! To me! Crawl!"

Silence. With a furious oath the avenger hurled himself forward. Knocking down furniture, smashing an unseen lamp, tripping over a low stool, he lunged savagely into the corner. He kicked for a body and found none. He clutched for a cowering form—stabbed for an upright one—and failed again. His hated kinsman had disappeared.

"Lights!" he bellowed. "Lamps! Lanterns! At once!"

Feet trampled. Matches blazed. A naked candle appeared. From somewhere came an oil lantern.

"Ha!" snarled the leader, a vindictive flash passing over his black-browed, hook-nosed, gash-mouthed visage. On the wall, as well as on the tiled floor, were bloodstains. From the wall, too, projected a small knob, smeared with fresh red. Barely visible were the outlines of a low door. Seizing the knob, he wrenched open the portal and raised his dagger. An instant he stood, peering blankly; then turned and snatched the lantern.

Beyond the door was a narrow stairway leading down. Light showed the stone steps to be streaked with blood. For perhaps twelve feet they descended—and there they ended at another door. A massive barrier was this, solid as stone, and as impregnable; of wood, to be sure, but one of those dense tropic woods which break axes. Of unknown thickness, and barred on the farther side, it blocked all pursuit.

For minutes Veinte Cuatro stood there and cursed, his face purple and his temples swollen with passion. On the stairs above, his own fearless, godless gang began to look at one another and quietly withdraw from him. Then, of a sudden, he broke into a wild laugh and remounted the steps.

"Let the rat lie in his hole," he chuckled. "There are other things to be done. You, Sargento Salas, take two men and remain here on guard. If the door opens, kill!"

"Kill, my general," acknowledged the stocky Salas, with a yellow-toothed grin.

His general strode back into the bedroom, where he volleyed commands.

"*Capitanes!* Take detachments and collect all moneys in the shops. Give the merchants the usual receipts. *Tenientes!* Seize all arms and ammunition to be found. All officers, see that order is preserved. No more shooting is necessary. Allow no violence unless attacked. Open the prison, of course, and bring all victims of oppression found there to me. *Libertad!*"

"*Libertad y justicia!*" rang a chorus. "Liberty and justice!" They flocked outward, and faces disappeared from corridor and window.

"You others," added the dictator to several who loitered, "search this house from end to end, floor to roof. Break all doors found locked. Bring to me the rats of the house of Traitor Jaime. They shall squeak!"

VI

IN THE gloom of the jail three men started from slumber. A few seconds of listening to the strident clamor outside, and two of them broke into joyous yells. The third remained silent, and on his shadowy face grew perturbation.

"Yeay!" shouted Kelly. "Here's where we eat! Sneaky Gordo's on his way to hell, and us poor convicts are out of the pen—almost. Boy! Listen to 'em tearin' into the *jefe's* house, will ye! Veinte Cuatro's gang, with blood in their eye! '*Muert' al traidor!*' "

"Quick curtain and a slow march for Jaime!" exulted Hart. "But Jean's in that house, and that mob sounds hardboiled. We've got to get over there, double time."

"Sure. Quick as we can. Give 'em the high sign and keep it up. Somebody'll hear it." With that he began bellowing, "*Libertad! Libertad! Amigos! Al cárcel! Libertad!*"

Hart's yells joined in. Presently Pablo, too, took up the call. Their release was a foregone conclusion, since conquering rebels invariably liberate the prisoners of the overthrown federals, and usually gain recruits thereby; for such prisoners frequently are not actual criminals but victims of official spite, and, naturally, embittered against all officialdom. However, the opening of the prison is likely to be an afterthought, and neither of these Americans was disposed to wait. Pablo, on the other hand, had little desire to emerge while shooting was in progress; but then it occurred to him that the sooner he slipped away from these fierce companions of his the better. Perhaps, too, he could turn a trick or two to his own advantage in the disorder.

So the three of them vociferated at the top of their lungs. For some time, however, no response came. The bugle rang, the uproar quieted, a series of shots indicated a duel at the official residence, and a virtual silence ensued. Then recommenced a noise of voices, of marchings, of sharp demands for opening of doors, and of splintering wood. At length came an abrupt thumping and creaking at the portal of the jail. The barrier swung back.

"*Libertad!*" exulted a hoarse voice outside. "Come forth, you in the trap! Liberty and justice are here!"

The Tiger and the Bull needed no second bidding. Out into the moonlight they lunged, almost colliding with several armed men. Pablo, wavering, hung back.

Without a word, the pair of Northerners shoved their liberators aside and started for the Gordo house. At once came clicks of rifle-hammers and an angry command.

"*Alto!* Stand there! Who are you, with your cursed arrogance?"

Kelly growled, and his right hand lifted to his shirt. But Hart spoke swiftly.

"Steady, Kelly! As you were!" He slowed, but did not halt. His voice snapped back over his shoulder, "El Tigre and El Toro, children! We go to Veinte Cuatro. Do you think it wise to stop us?"

A pause, filled with various noises from the town. The group began moving after them.

"El Tigre?" echoed a surprized voice. "El Tigre of the Vichada country? In the Caicara jail? It is impossible!"

"Impossible but true," retorted Hart, with a short laugh. "El Tigre, who came here in a boat and has starved since midday."

"*Cra!* I begin to believe you." The raiders closed in, their spokesman sharply scrutinizing the pair. "We have seen your boat. And you look much hungered. *Cra!* You are hurt! The arm is bad. *Bien.* You shall see the general, never fear. It is his order."

"*Bueno. Vamos.* Let us go."

They went, passing disorderly knots of roving marauders who, with no orders to fulfil, sought whatever they might find; meeting detachments moving as if under command and bound on definite missions; hearing rough talk, an occasional laugh, a smash of glass and a chorus of oaths as somebody dropped a bottle. The rum-shops already had been broken into.

To these details they gave little attention. Quietly, as they walked, Hart prompted—

"We don't know anything about the switch being out of the boat."

"Uh-huh. I got ye. We dunno where it's gone, so we can't fix it."

"*Qué dice?*" suspiciously demanded their escort.

"I was saying I hoped we could find some food."

"Ah. Most certainly. When you have talked with the general."

They were striding fast now, Hart setting the pace with space-eating swings. Lights were shining in the office of the *jefe civil*, and the shutters stood half open. Along the front of the house was posted a line of men standing at rest, lounging on their rifles, swapping low-toned jests, but sharply watching all comers. As the two strangers approached, these straightened.

"Not so fast, there, *hombres!*" one warned. "What do you want?"

"These are from the *cárcel*," returned the leader of the liberators. "The general will see them."

A derisive grin flashed along the line, teeth glinting in the white moonlight.

"Ho! The illustrious birds of the jail will honor the general at once with their presence? What marvelous courtesy! But the distinguished visitors will wait here, *sargento*, until the general is at liberty to receive them."

"To the —— with your general, and the same to you?" erupted Kelly, in jungle Spanish. "Get out from under our feet!"

An instant of amazed silence. Men stared at the truculent, harsh-voiced newcomer and his set-faced mate. Followed a mutter and the gleam of moonlight on rifle-barrels jerking upward.

"Steady, Kelly!" Hart snapped again.

But he did not slow down. Instead he threw a challenge beyond the bristling line. Sharp, biting, his voice sped through the windows of the office, where was visible a huddle of figures.

"Veinte Cuatro! Do you hide behind your men? El Tigre of the Vichada asks!"

"*Qué?*" jarred an angry shout from within. "What? Hide? *Diablo!* I?"

A chair squeaked back on the tiled floor and fell over with a bang. The figures in the lamplight were thrown to both sides like flotsam before the prow of a dreadnought. Shutters were yanked open to their fullest width, and at a window bulked a belligerent form peering out.

"Where is this Tigre who squalls so loud? Make way, you, and let him come, and all his *tigritos* with him!"

"Gracias!" mocked El Tigre. "I come, and my whole army at my side." And through the now yielding guard he and Kelly strode to the house. The squad which had followed them from the jail went no farther.

Within doors, the Northerners swung from the corridor into the office, where they halted. A motley group faced them: several under-officers, a number of scared peons and servants, a worried merchant or two, and, bulking over all, the thunder-faced Veinte Cuatro himself. For a few seconds all eyes focused on the insulting intruders, who swiftly scanned faces, vainly seeking that of Jean. Then the battered Bull and the crippled Tiger confronted the powerful Black Ant.

With sombrero thrown aside and ugly temper contracting his visage, Veinte Cuatro bore out his sobriquet. Black hair in a disordered shock, bushy black brows, threatening black eyes, huge black mustache, all combined with a steel-trap mouth and muscular jaws to suggest forcibly that giant insect with the dire bite. Now, with fist curled around the butt of his reloaded revolver, he glared at the impugners of his courage. In the semi-quiet of the moment sounded a thumping, battering disturbance somewhere at the rear of the place.

"For your prompt invitation to join you I thank you," was Hart's sarcastic greeting. "I am El Tigre. This is my entire fighting force—at present." He nodded sidewise toward Kelly. "I want two persons immediately. One is a fat snake called Jaime Gordo. The other is the *señorita Norte Americana.*"

ANOTHER pause, while the pounding at the rear continued. The hot gaze of the rebel commander burned into the steely eyes of the pair who, disheveled, dirty, alone and apparently unarmed amid hundreds of dangerous men, bore themselves with such assurance. An explosion seemed imminent—and it was. But when it came it was of an unexpected sort. With the suddenness of a lightning flash the menacing face changed, and under the sweeping mustache opened a mouth belching laughter.

"Ho ho ho!" roared Veinte Cuatro. "El Tigre and all his band? A couple of crowing cockerels from the dung-heap, my faith! Yo ho ho ho! Have you two birdlets been pecking under a rum-shop, that you prance so boldly and sing of señoritas? Or have you—"

Through his loud ridicule broke a rumbling, rending crepitation, succeeded by exultant yells.

"Aha! *Una mujer! La querida!* The sweetheart of the fat betrayer! Come to us, pretty one! Come to lovers who—"

Hart and Kelly wheeled, knocked two men spinning, leaped into the corridor. Down it they dashed, into the room where it ended, on through a connecting room. As they entered a third chamber they saw at its farther side a wrecked door, beyond which several figures struggled amid laughing oaths.

"Jean!" shouted Hart.

"Ye-yes!" called a panting voice. "Here—these men—"

Then out came Kelly's concealed gun. It darted to an aim at the group beyond, whose grinning faces had turned doorward at Hart's hail; and with menacing mien its owner advanced on them. Hart's hand instinctively closed at the top of his empty holster. Finding the black butt gone from its accustomed place, it sank a little lower, concealing the lack of a weapon and simulating readiness for a fast draw. As the astonished gangsters halted motion and stared at the strangers, Kelly blared:

"Hands off! Leave her free! You sons of *Indios*, go and paw the half-breed women of the town! Guns down! I will blow the guts out of your bellies if you make a move!" Then, in English, "Come on, Miss Jean. Duck low, so's I can shoot over ye. Make it snappy!"

He had halted now, and Hart with him. For a second it seemed that the reckless rebels would force him to shoot; but then, all at once, they became stolid, almost meek, as if in the presence of their commander. From their midst emerged Jean, running through the doorway without regard to Kelly's warning not to block his fire. She was breathing hard and wild-eyed, her hair and clothing were disordered, and one hand was reddened at the knuckles; but she laughed as she came—albeit with a note slightly hysterical. Her gaze lingered only an instant on her rescuers; then went beyond them with a questioning look.

Hart, following her glance, turned his head, then faced about. In the entrance through which they had just come stood a man who had pursued them so quietly that they had not heard him, and whose presence explained the sudden obedience of the girl's captors; Veinte Cuatro himself.

On his saturnine face now was a half-smile, which broadened a trifle as the girl stopped beside the blond American and, with a movement half appealing, half protective, and wholly unconscious, laid a hand on his taut right arm. The glinting black eyes passed over her from top to toe and back again, then over the wounded man to whom she clung. They switched to the broad back of Kelly, still holding his drop. The smile became a wide grin.

"It seems that you have found your señorita," whimsically conceded the conqueror. "And *por Dios*, one well worth seeking! I did not know there was such a one. Now, General El Tigre, would you be so magnanimous as to order your artillery to cease threatening my poor *soldados?* They are only obeying my orders to search this house and bring to me all persons found. This last door was most stubborn. Had I known who waited beyond it, matters would have been conducted differently."

With that he bowed low—a movement as graceful as unexpected. And neither Hart nor Jean, though watching him searchingly, found in his new manner anything sneering or sinister. Rather, it was that of a good-humored cavalier paying homage to beauty.

"What about it, Hart?" hoarsely asked Kelly, rigid from strain. "Is he holdin' a gun on me back, or—"

"No. Ease up. He's on the level."

"And," added Jean with a quick smile, "I think he's a gentleman."

"He better be," grunted Kelly, crusty as ever.

But his weapon vanished, and he turned with relief. Veinte Cuatro chuckled, and, to the surprize of all, spoke in halting English.

"There have been—a time when *todo el mundo*—ev'reebodee—call Federico Gordo gentil-man. Per-hap he no have—have not —forget those day."

Jean blushed. Before she could reply Hart countered bruskly.

"Then prove it by ordering all your men to treat this lady with the consideration due her. And you can tell *todo el mundo* that anybody calling her the *querida* of Jaime Gordo will have his head knocked off. And that reminds me. Where is that crocodile of a Jaime?"

The general's bushy brows drew down, and his eyes hardened.

"You are short in your ways, señor. Your demands are unnecessary and uncivil. I shall attend to those matters without instructions from you." He made an imperative gesture. The men still standing at the ruined doorway slouched forward, filed past, disappeared toward the front. "A guard shall be placed here, and all others kept out. When you have had time to compose yourself, señorita, I shall ask you a few questions. You men will come with me. That Jaime—he is not for you; he is mine, and I will—"

He stopped short. Somewhere outside sounded several shots, a screaming yell, two more reports; then shouts, queries, vague replies.

For a minute or two the room was very still. In the soft lamplight eye met eye, while Veinte Cuatro grimly awaited an explanation. Came then a quick tread through the rooms beyond, and an under-officer appeared.

"My general," he cried, "the peon who was under your examination has found his tongue at last—with a little persuasion. My general, the place below this house where that Jaime fled is not only a room, says the peon, but a tunnel! It runs under the ground to some other house. So while we thought the betrayer to be penned beyond that door he has escaped!"

Veinte Cuatro bristled.

"Escaped!" he thundered. "Escaped? *Sangre de Cristo*, he does not escape from me! By the horned —— I will have him, if I tear to pieces every house! What was that shooting?"

"That? Ah, that was nothing, my general. It seems that two of the men have a little too much rum, and—ah—they became angered at a man said to be from up the river, and—ah—unfortunately shot him to death. He is nobody; a common man who was in jail with these two señores. One of our *soldados* says his name was Pablo Benito."

VII

ORDER, if not peace, had descended on the pueblo of Caicara. Gone was the turbulent confusion consequent on the midnight surprise and seizure. Now, although armed men moved in every street and busied themselves in many a house, every movement was under command, every invasion of dwelling or shop watched by officer or noncom. The reckless mob had become a military body; the turmoil had given way to martial law. Veinte Cuatro, the forceful Black Ant, had shut his jaws and clamped the town in an iron grip.

Within fifteen minutes after the shooting of Pablo Benito the transformation from lawless license to cold control was complete. The swiftness and thoroughness of it spoke volumes for the strength of the mercurial commander. These men of his were restive, unruly individuals at best, many of them outlawed for good cause, and all of them hard-bitted; and with rum in their brains and a defenceless town in their power, they were hardly more amenable to discipline than a pack of wolves. Yet, when the commands of Veinte Cuatro sped among them on the tongues of sharp-voiced officers, they came to heel like dogs—growling, snarling, showing their teeth, perhaps, but obedient to the voice of the master.

Ordered to disarm and imprison their two mates who had shot down Pablo, they forthwith disarmed and imprisoned them. Told to surround the town, picket the riverbank, and search every house for Jaime Gordo, they surrounded, picketed and searched. Warned that violence to noncombatants, looting of premises, or molestation of women would incur summary punishment, they refrained from commission of any such offenses. True, a few little articles which took the fancy of certain searchers may have disappeared from the possession of their owners; and it is quite possible that good-looking girls found in conveniently dark places by young *soldados* were embraced with extreme ardor—but they did not complain about it. All in all, the mandates of Federico Gordo were carried out with a promptness and precision almost incredible.

"Diablo y diablillos del infierno!" he swore, on learning of the death of Pablo. "Is this an army fighting for liberty and justice, or a herd of drunken beasts? Shall it be said that Federico Gordo is a mere disorderly *guapo* and his men butchers? Order I demand, and order I will have!"

In thus demanding and enforcing order, he saw no incongruity in the facts that he had entered the town amid powder-flame and terror, that he had commanded the seizure of its money and its arms, and that he himself had shot his blood brother. Had he been interrogated by the Recording Angel as to the basic difference between these acts and those of his followers, he might have answered—with some amazement and more resentment—that he had not been sure the place was ungarrisoned, and that therefore he had made his entry forceful in order to cow any resistance before it could start; that the commandeering of moneys and munitions was a matter of military necessity, and that the usual promissory notes had been given; and that vengeance upon the traitorous Jaime was a duty of honor. But the slaying of a citizen by his men in a petty brawl was a flagrant violation of his orders, a crime against the peace and security of the people, and a reflection on his own ability to govern. Wherefore he would have no more of such insubordination.

Now, while the sobered pair of killers held gloomy converse in the jail and the body of their victim lay straight and still on the floor of the office of the vanished Jaime, the stern-browed leader conducted a brief examination. Farther back in the house, with shutters closed and a double guard stationed at the door, the three Americans sat exchanging experiences of the past twelve hours. Outside proceeded the persistent search for the hated *jefe civil;* a blind hunt, since the peon who had revealed the existence of the tunnel did not know whither it led. In all the town, the only one not engaged in some form of physical or mental activity was Pablo Benito, whose work and worry were forever past.

Beside his lifeless form Veinte Cuatro straightened up, wiped his hands, and swept a smoldering gaze along the faces of several of his men. All others had been banished from the room.

"The bullets struck in the back," he declared. "The man was running away. He made no fight."

"None," agreed a short, alert-looking fellow. "But he was offensive and angered Luis and Rafael—"

"How?"

"Strutting, boasting, and acting the *guapo*. He had drunk rum. It flew to his head at once. He became loud and loose in his talk. He said he was a *guapo* who had fought under El Tigre of the Vichada; he had done many things bold and desperate; now he would take whatever plunder he liked in this town; we had best walk wide of him; and such things. Luis and Rafael sneered and told him to get away from them. He did step away, but he called them certain names. Then he turned and ran. Luis and Rafael are hot of head. They shot."

"Ah." The commander looked thoughtfully down at the dead face. "Do you know this man?"

The witness answered in the negative. Another man spoke up.

"I do. He was keeper of the cart road around the rapids at Atures. A scheming fellow of little courage but much conceit. He had not bravery enough to fight nor brains enough to keep his mouth shut. A poor bag of wind."

"Ah," repeated Federico, with a contemptuous inflection. "A sheep who would be a wolf. The old story. But he had a family?"

"*Sí.*"

The black-lashed lids narrowed. For a moment the inky eyes glimmered as if peering afar, seeing in a masterless home a widow and fatherless children. The broad jaw tightened.

"Those two have given trouble before now," he said. "An example must be made." His glance darted to a silent captain. Curtly he added, "At sunrise!"

The officer saluted. The others lifted the body from the tiles. Except for a loitering orderly, all moved quietly outward. So passed Pablo Benito from the room where, a few hours agone, he had turned so readily against his companions at the behest of a man who struck from behind; a schemer who had outschemed himself, earning for his final reward only a couple of slugs in the back, and leaving to his children a name signifying vacillation and vanity. From the lamplight to the moonlight he was borne; and in the moonlight his bearers paused, looked at each other, and turned their steps toward the river. Grave-digging is tedious and tiresome work, and in the Orinoco are plenty of crocodiles.

As these men left, others arrived, bringing various reports. Seated at his brother's council-table, the rebel leader listened, gave succinct instructions, sent them away. Thereafter he picked up the long Colt of El Tigre, found in the room where Jaime had fought. With a grim smile he inspected it, weighed it in a big hand, fondled it as if it pleased him. Presently he shoved it under his belt; frowned again as if pondering; then jerked his head at the attentive orderly.

"Bring here my three guests."

THE man departed down the corridor. At the door of the "guest" room the guards stepped aside to let him enter. Beyond, he found the three eating cold food and drinking hot coffee brought by some servant from the kitchen. Unspeaking, they eyed him questioningly.

"The general will talk with you at once."

"Good enough," approved Hart. "It's about time you got some sleep, Jean, and after this palaver you can turn in, perhaps. Let's go."

"I do feel a little fagged," she admitted.

Kelly made no comment. He emptied his coffee-cup and arose. They filed out, and, a moment later, were facing Veinte Cuatro. The orderly placed a chair for Jean, who sank into it, steadily regarding the new ruler of the town. Hart and Kelly stood on either side of her, their attitudes easy but their eyes watchful. The recent geniality of the revolutionist was not now in evidence; his pose was formal, his expression austere. When he spoke, it was in his native tongue.

"I regret, señorita, the necessity of keeping you longer from your rest, but after this conference you may sleep in perfect security; and I shall not detain you here long. Do me the favor of telling me how you came here."

With an impersonality matching his own, she complied. Briefly she identified herself and sketched her voyage up the river; in more detail she narrated the events of her return trip, with particular reference to the things which had come about since arrival at Caicara. As she spoke of the duplicity of the *jefe civil* and of Pablo, resentment crept into her tone; but this changed to a mirthful note as she mentioned her fall from the *sarrapia* and her whirlwind combat with Jaime. As she finished, a slight smile flitted across the tight lips of Federico.

"*Bueno*," he approved. "You are a brave young woman. Now tell me what you know of these men."

"I think, señor, that they are quite able to speak for themselves," was her gentle reproof. "But I can tell you that they have been most valiant defenders, and that without their aid I could not have escaped from a very bad situation."

"*Bien*. You have named them Señores 'Art and Kay-lee. By what other names are they known?"

She glanced up at her stalwart guardians. Hart nodded carelessly.

"Tell him," he acquiesced.

"Very well. Señor Hart is also called El Tigre; Señor Kelly, El Toro."

With that she stood up, tacitly indicating her decision to say no more. The interrogator bowed and also arose.

"Many thanks, señorita. You may retire. Rest without fear. It would be well for you to sleep while you can, for my troops will be withdrawn from this place before another sunset. *Buen' noche'*."

Another formal bow. After a momentary hesitation she walked confidently to the corridor, throwing a nod and a smile to El Tigre and El Toro as she went. The eyes of all three men followed her slender figure into the dimness beyond the door.

"Now," went on the raider, his tone becoming more brusk, "Señor El Tigre, explain to me one thing. That Tigre of whom I have heard was a fighter, a *revolucionario* with a strong hand and a strong band. If you are that one, how comes it that you desert the cause of liberty and justice when every good fighter is needed? I find it hard to believe that courtesy to a young woman is your only motive."

Hart's head snapped up angrily.

"Meaning that I am now going over to the federals? Any man who says that is a liar!"

The Venezuelan's hands closed slightly, but he made no other move. His unwinking gaze bored steadily into the wrathful face of the American.

"You can blow all the federals in the country to ——, and then blow the whole rotten country after them, as far as I am concerned!" the latter raged. "I am through with the whole mess. I am getting out. Call it desertion or what you like—I don't give a —— for your opinion! But if you're hunting deserters find the patriotic *revolucionarios* who used to ride with me and you will have a fine bunch of them. They gave me this—" he gestured toward his wounded shoulder "—when my back was turned. And don't talk 'liberty and justice' to me! Feed that sort of pap to thickheaded peons. I'm sick of the sound of it!"

A pause, while eye continued to clash with eye. Then a faint grin seemed to flit under the heavy mustache. Without reply, the Southerner turned his attention to Kelly.

"And you? Who are you, and why are you here with this one?"

"El Toro of Colombia. I bossed the old Malojo gang until I was tired of it." The Spanish brows lifted. "I deserted them, if it is any of your business. I feel the same as Hart. Colombia and Venezuela can both be ——. I go home."

Kelly's voice, though rough, was not angry like that of his mate; it was coolly defiant and determined. His gray gaze met the black orbs without a flicker of feeling. Veinte Cuatro studied him for unmeasured seconds.

"The Malojo band? A bad one! And how came you to control it?"

"I shot old Malojo."

"Ho! So? A most laudable act, my faith!" The hairy lips stretched in a wolfish grin. "I had intended to shoot him myself at some good time. *Bien*. But— You will raise your hands! High!"

The command came like the snap of a whip. At the same instant his own revolver sprang from its sheath and covered the self-confessed bandit. Kelly reddened and slowly obeyed.

"Within the shirt, Jorge," directed the captor. The orderly, gliding behind El Toro, passed an arm around him, extracted the concealed weapon from its sling, and stepped back. "You are too dangerous to be allowed to keep the weapon longer," grinned the raider. "You might decide to shoot me as you shot Malojo, and take control of my army!"

"Yeah. I might," retorted Kelly, with a glare. "So why not shoot us both? Then you need not be afraid of us."

"Afraid?" The black-fringed mouth tightened again. "Afraid! Ah, *sí!* Of one thing I am afraid, you fool, but it is not you! I fear that you may make me or my men shoot you because of your offensiveness; and I will have no more such shootings in this town. I took your weapon to prevent you from provoking disorder. Now go back to your quarters! *Vaya!*"

The revolver-muzzle, which had sunk, jerked impatiently toward the rear. The unarmed pair complied, although with no abatement of their stiff-grained independence; moving deliberately, and exchanging comments not diplomatic. As they passed down the corridor, however, Kelly became philosophic.

"Wal, we come through without casualties, anyway," he vouchsafed, "and he's a squarer guy than his brother, at that. Hits right out from the shoulder and lets another guy do the same. He was givin' us the works to see how we'd come back at him, I bet, and we handled him right. He's satisfied now that we're the guys we say we are. Because why? Because we give him the hard-boiled line o' talk we'd naturally give him if we was El Tigre and El Toro. If we'd squirmed around and acted worried he might have stood us up against a wall; I wouldn't put it past him. He's bitter as gall with anybody that tries puttin' anything over on him, I bet."

"Uh-huh. Naturally, after what his brother handed him."

"Yeah. Wal, he's got nothin' on us, and we're in the clear for a while, anyway. And there's some grub waitin' on the table. We could be a lot worse off. Might grab a wink o' sleep 'twixt now and reveille, too. Guess the kid's turned in already."

They returned to the room where they had been lunching, the guards passing them in without a word, then standing again to their vigil. Hart went on to the portal where the shattered door hung askew; listened, and came back, nodding to Kelly. Quietly they resumed eating. And beyond the splintered barrier Jean, lying with heavy eyes still open, let them close and swiftly dropped into peaceful sleep.

VIII

DAWN. A pale shroud filmed the sky, blotting from it the stars. A weak half-light crawled along the ground, giving a lifeless look to houses, a sickly appearance to slow-moving, weary men. Sentries and outposts nodded over their rifles or, concealed in various nooks, shamelessly slept. Glum, sour-speaking groups stood about or worked half-heartedly at the still fruitless search for Jaime Gordo. Frowning heavily, Federico Gordo sat again in the office, brooding over the failure to unearth his wounded brother. In rooms at the rear slept the Americans; Jean in her hammock, her guardians hunched over at a table, heads resting on arms.

Rapidly the light brightened. Cocks began to crow. Men straightened, walked with a little more vim, though yawning long and often. As a pink blush dyed the eastern clouds, from somewhere came marching a squad of sombre-faced men, eyes set stonily to the front, rifles rigid on their shoulders. Commanded by a *sargento*, they trod in unison to one side of the plaza and halted a few yards from a blank wall. There they grounded arms and stood at rest. The non-com strode away, halting again outside an open window of the office.

"Ready, my general," he announced in monotone.

The frown of Veinte Cuatro tightened perceptibly. To several officers standing about he spoke:

"Is a priest in this town?"

"None at present, the *gente* say," answered one.

An instant of hesitation. Then he arose, grim and ruthless.

"Bugles," he ordered. "Summon all to the plaza. Lieutenant Compero—" His sidewise nod indicated another duty for that officer. The lieutenant and his fellows hastened out.

A couple of minutes later the bugles blared. Loud, imperious, unfeeling, they volleyed notes over the town, startling the heaviest sleeper into full wakefulness. Succeeded a medley of orders, a confused trampling of feet, as the forces of Veinte Cuatro gathered from all sides and took designated positions. Thereafter ensued shouts summoning to the plaza all citizens of Caicara.

At their table, Hart and Kelly started up, throwing blank looks around. The former strode to a window and threw its shutter wide. In rushed the cool, sweet breeze of early morning and the light of the new day. The sky now was becoming fiery red.

Kelly, advancing to the door, found the guards alert but morose. They scanned him sourly.

"What is the assembly, *hombres?*" he asked.

"Two men are to be shot. And we shall not see it," grumbled one.

"Huh! Who are they?"

"Fools who disobeyed the general."

"Oh. Well, go and see the show. The night is done; so is your duty."

They looked quickly at each other, their sourness vanishing.

"You will not try an escape?"

"Huh? We are not prisoners, *hombre,* we are guests of the general. I will go with you."

"*Bueno!* Quickly, señor!"

"A moment." To Hart, with a wink and a thumb-jerk toward Jean's room, he added loudly, "Some guys are leavin' for the west, Hart, and the gang's givin' 'em a bump—a send-off. Want to take it in?"

"Guess not," came the casual reply. "I'll stick around. Go ahead."

"Quickly, señor!" besought the guards again.

As he stepped forward they loped to the corridor, aglow with excited expectation. Kelly, with a blasé yawn, lounged along at an unhurried pace.

Reaching the open, they found the raiders drawn up in two long columns, standing at ease, their lines dressed toward the blank wall. At one end of the inclosed space waited the sombre squad. At the other was massing the populace, asking no questions—for any Venezuelan knows the meaning of a squad and a wall. In the midway, silent but dominating, bulked the great, black Veinte Cuatro, thumbs in belt and shoulders back. The rustle and jostle became a tense stillness. Overhead blazed the first rays of the fast-rising sun.

Against the wall now appeared several figures moving in from one side. Two of these were halted and swung about to face the assemblage. The others retreated. The pair stood alone, backs to the adobe. The armed squad facing them stiffened, watching the lieutenant who had taken position at one side. The two against the wall looked at the squad. That was the last look one of them gave to anything.

A heavily built, strong looking man was this, seemingly rugged enough to meet any fate without flinching. Yet now, after one furtive glance at the knot of riflemen, he swayed on his feet; his visage contorted, his eyes shut tight, and his head drooped. In that position he froze, dumbly waiting, blindly holding his face toward the earth. The other, much slighter of frame, stood with chin in air and gaze roving defiantly along the columns, over the crowd of townsmen, and back to his executioners. In one hand he held a freshly lighted cigaret, from which he drew an occasional puff of smoke.

"People of Caicara!"

Grave, cold, measured, the deep chest-tones of Federico Gordo boomed across the plaza like the tolling of a bell. At its sonorous impact the heavier of the doomed pair started visibly, but did not look up. His companion took a quick draw at his cigaret, then stood watching as if he were only a disinterested spectator.

"Citizens of a misruled town, victims of a tyrannical government! You know that I, Federico Gordo, fight against oppression; that I make war to free our country from the chains of slavery, to sweep away corruption, to restore to your lives the freedom and happiness of liberty and justice. You know that there can be no liberty without justice, no justice without impartiality. And you know there can be no safety without just law and just punishment for those who violate such law. You are called here to witness the fact that I not only speak these things but act them; that I do not lay upon you one law and upon my own men another; that I protect all who conduct themselves with peace and order, punish those who do not. I stand for order and justice in government, and order and justice I will have!

"Last night I commanded that no inhabitant of this town should be harmed unless he himself made violence. That is my rule in every town I take. Later a man was shot by two of my *soldados.* He was not one of you, but a visitor. He provoked my men and brought his death on himself. Yet he was unarmed and harmless. The killing of him was unnecessary and unjustifiable; a disobedience of my command, a lawless violation of peace and order. Those men now pay the penalty."

His speech ceased as abruptly as it had begun. He turned, looking at the pair against the wall. The slim fellow looked straight back at him; lifted his cigaret once more, drew a last puff deep into his lungs, and deliberately tossed the butt away; slowly exhaled the smoke, lifted his head still higher, and gazed into the far sky.

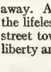
Veinte Cuatro flung up a hand. The lieutenant voiced a curt command. Rifle-butts leaped to shoulders. Another order; the steel tubes froze into aim. A third bark—a thumping crash.

As they had stood, so the two fell. The heavy one pitched on his face, rigid as a toppling tree. The wiry one, head unbowed, dropped loosely on his back. Both lay motionless.

Veinte Cuatro turned again, his gaze sweeping along the lines of his own men and coming to rest on the crowded townsmen.

"You have seen," he said gruffly. "Let it not be forgotten."

Without another word he strode back to the house of his brother. Silently his forces broke ranks, and quietly the citizens melted away. At the foot of the wall six men lifted the lifeless figures and trudged down a side street toward the cemetery. The lesson in liberty and justice was over.



KELLY, expressionless, sauntered back to headquarters, his attendants close behind making great show of zeal in watching him. As soon as they had passed the doorway of the office without drawing a question from Veinte Cuatro, however, the guardian pair dropped their pretense. In low tones they fell to discussing the coolness of Rafael, the fear of Luis, the difference in their ways of falling, and kindred details. The American, ignoring them, reentered the room where he and Hart had napped. He found the latter seated at the table with Jean, who, though sleepy-eyed, looked refreshed by her few hours of rest.

"Mornin', miss," he saluted. "How d'ye feel this glorious mornin'?"

"Just a little sleepy," she confessed, stifling a yawn, "and very much puzzled as to how we are to continue our journey. You said last night that the boat wouldn't run, and—"

"It'll run as quick as these guys move out," he assured her, lowering his tone. "And they ain't stayin' much longer. They must have picked this burg clean before now."

"But—they haven't found Gordo, have they? Or have they? What—what was that shooting just now?" Her face was suddenly serious.

"Aw, no. That wasn't nothin'. Jest a kind of a—a salute to Pablo Benito, to tell ye the truth. Uh—did ye hear the general's speech?"

"No. We heard a big voice talking, but I didn't catch the words."

"Wal, ye see, he made a kind of an oration about peace and order and liberty and justice, and how it was tough that Pablo got knocked off, and there wouldn't be no more o' that rough stuff. And then they fired that salute. And some fellers that was goin' on a trip by the general's orders went as per schedule, so it was a kind of a send-off for them too. Funny time to pull a stunt like that, ye might say, but down here they like to git things done in the cool o' the mornin'."

She watched him dubiously as he talked; but his tone was so casual, his gaze so candid, that his deceptive explanation passed muster. Hart's eyes twinkled, but he preserved a poker face. In the same careless way Kelly added:

"This Jaime guy, he's made his gitaway, I guess, and it's a sore man I am; I wanted to give him somethin' to take to the hospital with him. But about the boat, I'll put her in trim as soon as these ginks pull out, and I don't think they'll stick around on Jaime's account. They'll git him some other time."

Jean looked soberly out through a window.

"It's too bad about Pablo," she said. "He wasn't so good, but he might have been much worse, perhaps. He was all right except for—for being so weak that anybody could wind him around a finger. And his wife and children—"

"They'll make out all right," comforted Hart. "She's a capable woman, and I'll bet she knows where he hid many a good silver *bolívar*. He made money on his cartage and never spent it. Nobody will mourn him long. Weaklings seldom live to old age in this country, anyway. Speaking of the boat, it seems queer that nobody's said anything about it yet. The revolutionist never lived who'd let a fast boat get away from him—"

"Ssss!" warned Kelly. "Somebody comin'."

The somebody proved to be Veinte Cuatro himself, accompanied by a couple of subordinates. No sound had heralded his approach, but Kelly had noted that the lounging guards had suddenly stiffened to soldierly alertness. Now a brief sentence of dismissal was heard, and the sentinels gladly left their post. As they disappeared the others entered. At a glance it was evident that the mood of the leader had changed again.

"*Buen' dia'*." He bowed. "Señorita, I trust that you have rested well. And I hope, Señor 'Art, that your temper is improved by food and sleep."

"A little," Hart conceded. "It would be still better if we had a good breakfast."

"That is good. You shall have it at once. It makes me most uncomfortable to have a hungry *tigre* so near me." The black-lashed lids twitched humorously. "Afterwards perhaps you will tell my engineer officer how to make your boat run. He says it does not operate."

Blank stares and unreadable expressions met this announcement. After a pause Hart queried—

"Do we understand that you mean to take our boat from us?"

"Not precisely. And yet—yes. You men, as men of experience, must understand what such a boat means to my forces: a swift scouting boat, a little boat of war, going many miles in a day. But it is my wish that the señorita be carried as far as possible on her way. Therefore when it is in condition we shall speed down the river to some point where you three can easily find a *piragua*, in which you can continue safely to Bolívar. After that I shall leave you."

Another pause, while the trio appeared to consider the proposal.

"Oh, general, please do not take my boat!" pleaded Jean, looking doleful. "It is so comfortable and—"

"I am desolated, señorita, by the necessity. But I must have the boat. Be assured that you shall be well provided when it leaves you. And, if you will pardon me, it is not your boat. One of my men recognizes it as the property of a merchant of Bolivar. Thus the loss will be his, not yours. It is unavoidable."

His tone, though courteous, was final. Hart and Kelly looked at each other as if accepting the inevitable.

"*Bien*," said the former. "General, no gas boat will run without gas. That was why we stopped here."

Up spoke one of the officers in a tone of annoyance.

"*Maldito!* Do I not know enough to put in fuel? The tank is filled. But the engine will not start."

The Americans achieved another blank look. Then Kelly chuckled patronizingly.

"You do not understand the compression," he said. "It is very simple. I will show you—after breakfast. General, when do we eat?"

"Now. At once. You will come then to the office? *Bueno*. Señorita, accept my apologies for intrusion."

More bows, and a dignified withdrawal. The three glanced at one another, and Kelly slyly touched the pocket wherein reposed the vital switch.

"I bet that spiffy ingineer officer dunno his right hand from his left when it comes to marine ingynes," he muttered. "I'll soon find out."

"And if he doesn't?" breathed Jean.

"Remains to be seen, as the guy said at the morgue. Mebbe we can put one over on His Nibs yet."

"Have to make it slick and snappy," cautioned Hart. "If we make one fumble we're completely out of luck."

"And wouldn't it be rather a shame," laughed Jean, "to deceive our friend? He's such a gentlemanly sort of robber!"

"Robber?" Hart's brows lifted in mock reproof. "My dear girl, the fact that he seizes our guns and our launch, and perhaps changes his mind about giving us a ride after the launch is back in commission—that's not robbery. It's only 'liberty and justice'."

"Yeah. Liberty and justice," echoed Kelly, his face hardening.

His head lifted, and his eyes dwelt sombrely on the door through which the volatile commander had gone. Despite his outward callousness—which, in truth, was considerably more than skin deep—he kept seeing again the slim, dauntless fellow with the cigaret whose life had just been shot out in the names of *libertad y justicia*. That fellow, he felt, had been worth a hundred such as Pablo Benito. Where was the justice of executing a brave man for the death of a yellow dog?

"Bunk! Blah!" he growled aloud. "Grandstand play, that's all 'twas! This guy's a big cheese! He makes me sick!"

"What?" questioned Jean, wonderingly.

"Aw, nothin'." He stood up. "I don't want no breakfast, I guess. Got a sour taste in me mouth. I'll go down and stall round the boat. If I don't git back before long the two o' ye might mosey down and see how I'm makin' out."

His eye held Hart's for a second. Then he sauntered out.

IX

ATTENDED by the "engineer officer," Kelly took his deliberate way to the port, meanwhile sizing up men and affairs. To Veinte Cuatro, surprized by his prompt appearance, he had carelessly remarked that he desired a mouthful of air, and that, since the solving of the difficulty with the engine would take but a moment, it might as well be attended to now; a suggestion to which the raider had cordially assented. With the nimbleness which seemed characteristic of him, Gordo had already put his mind to other things; and now, feeding himself with one hand—his appetite evidently unimpaired by the recent execution—he was using the other to check up a list of commandeered funds and supplies. The table was loaded with canvas bags bulging with silver specie; reluctant but inevitable contributions by the townsmen to "liberty and justice"; and men were toiling to lift the lid of a locked iron chest which undoubtedly formed the federal strongbox. Thus pleasingly engaged, the conqueror gave only a moment to the matter of the boat.

Outside it was breakfast time. Campfires burned in the plaza, and from every house came the varying scents of cookery and the impatient tones of hungry men. The search for the hated *jefe civil* evidently was suspended, if not entirely given up; and to all appearance, the spectacular shooting of a few minutes ago was already forgotten. Yet the observer knew that it was stamped deep on every mind, and that these men would be exceedingly slow to fire on any one unless ordered to do so by an officer. With this thought in mind he covertly studied the officer walking beside him.

This gentleman, a head shorter than he, was a slick looking rascal who obviously thought very well of himself, and whose attitude betokened decided unfriendliness toward the foreigner who had just belittled his knowledge. He walked with stiff back, unpleasant sidelong glances, and an occasional caress of the revolver and knife on his broad waist-belt. The bigger man felt an impulse to slap his face and kick him; but he restrained it. Unspeaking, they walked on to the bowldery waterfront.

There Kelly looked about with some surprise. He had expected to find the port choked with floating craft. Instead, it held only a few canoes and the launch. Near at hand slouched a couple of heavy-eyed sentries, posted to watch the river, but giving it scant attention.

"*Teniente*, when do we get relief?" growled one of these. "Do we never rest or eat?"

The slick lieutenant seemed to swell. Here was a chance to show authority.

"What! You were not relieved at daybreak? Go, you, at once—at once, understand me!—to the *sargento* of the guard! Tell him that I, *yo*, Teniente Mendez, command him to post new men here immediately! *Vaya!*"

"I go," grinned the other.

And he briskly departed. The second sentinel brightened up, took a few languid steps, hen stopped and slouched again.

Kelly, turning his back on the loitering picket, let his gaze rove along the bank below. He saw no other watchers. A glint came into his eye and was gone. Yawning, he said:

"You came here by land, I see. There are no boats."

"Plenty of boats," disputed the other, his tone superior. "They are above here. You did not suppose we made a blind landing at so open a spot as this?"

"I did think so. But I understand now."

The officer gave a supercilious smirk, plainly intimating that the American knew little of military strategy. Kelly bit back a grin and looked as stupid as he could. They straddled into the launch, which rode snugly at the edge of the mud bank. Kelly took a look at the fore deck and saw that it was daubed with muddy tracks around the fuel instake; sniffed, and caught the reek of gasoline. The tank had been filled to overflowing by the men whose footmarks disfigured the drab paint. Inside, at the bow, stood several unopened five-gallon cans.

"You say the tank has been filled?" he asked, as if too dense to deduce the meaning of the litter forward.

"*Sí.*"

"*Bien.* Then the only trouble is that the engine is cold. One must pour a little gasoline in this cup—see?—and open this cock—so—and push this heavy wheel over—so—to suck it in; then bring it back hard—see? Then comes the explosion. Oh, yes, there is another thing. One must first turn on the electricity from the battery over here, and —*Cra!*"

He stared as if astounded; took a couple of long steps, lifted the cover of the battery compartment, looked outside again at the wiring; turned an angry face on the Venezuelan.

"What have you done to the switch?"

"*Qué?* What? What have I— *Ajo!* What do you mean?"

The emptiness of the pretensions of the "engineer" was palpably evident. Quite likely he knew how to operate a cheap automobile (until it broke down), but of motor-boats he had only the faintest comprehension. Staring at Kelly and following the pointing finger, he looked perturbed.

"The switch, *hombre!*" Kelly glared accusingly. "You have ruined the switch! Without it the boat will never run! What did you do with it?"

"Ah, the sweetch!" parroted Mendez, striving to conceal his ignorance. "*Por Dios*, I did nothing to it! I have disarranged nothing—"

"Then who did? You are in charge of this boat. You have been in it since I left it. If you did not ruin it, who did? *Caramba*, the general shall hear of this at once!"

The lieutenant paled. The lone sentinel, keenly interested in the loud accusations, came out of his slouch and glided closer. On him the officer's eyes fastened.

"You, *hombre!*" he barked. "Who has been in this boat?"

"Nobody. Nobody but you and those you brought here to work on it." The man's response was prompt and certain.

"You are sure? Nobody in the night? You did not sleep?"

"No!" The answer came angrily. "*Cra*, I wish I had slept! Hours of useless walking and watching, and nothing to watch but crocodiles! And not even a crocodile touched the boat."

"Aha," sneered Kelly. "You can not blame the men, *teniente*. It is for you to explain this damage. We shall go to the general at once—"

"No, no! A moment! *Sangre de Cristo*, what a calamity! I have not injured anything—but he may not believe me. Is there not some way of repairing the cursed thing? I am—I am not familiar with this kind of arrangement—it is different from all engineering I have known—a very peculiar type, yes. But there must be a way of making repairs. And the general is most busy. I command you to make this boat ready to go!"

With difficulty Kelly swallowed a snicker. The mental scrambling of this coxcomb in an effort to save his face amused him hugely. Gritting his teeth, he frowned at the engine until his inward mirth passed.

"Your commands do not change the matter," he countered, roughly. "Can I take a new switch out of my ear, *hombre*, and fix it in place? You bray like a burro! That switch must be made right or the boat does not run! It is for you to make it right!"

The officer scowled portentously, but his eyes were distinctly scared. He must clear himself somehow— Ah! An idea! He would tell Veinte Cuatro that this American had slyly disabled the boat and—

"But wait," said Kelly, in a tone somewhat less harsh. "Possibly *el capitán*—the light-haired man—may know of some way of making a repair. He is the captain of this boat. It will do no harm to ask him. If the matter can be mended the general need not know of it. He only wants the boat to run."

"*Sí!*" Mendez snatched the bait like a hungry trout. "It is as you say. The general must not be troubled by small matters. *Bien*. Let us go."

"Huh!" A disgusted grunt. "Shall I walk up the hill only to walk down again? And can *el capitán* say what shall be done without seeing the boat? He must come here. Until he comes I shall test the other parts. The man who ruined the switch may have done other damage. You go."

An instant of hesitation; then came realization that, in a dead boat and without his companions, the American would hardly take leave. There was the sentry, too, on guard. He hopped ashore, gave the rifleman a significant look, and hastened townward.

"And that's that," Kelly said to himself. "Now for the next step, as the guy said when he crep' upstairs with a jag on. Can I talk this guy over, I wonder?" He eyed the guard, who was watching with an air of grim readiness. Then he looked beyond and saw two new men swinging sulkily down the hill. The self-important Mendez met them, stopped them, gave some snappish order, and went on. The pair resumed their approach.

"Not so good," amended Kelly. "This is the relief." Turning, he began fussing around the battery.

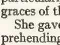
Meanwhile, up at headquarters, Hart had quietly said to Jean:

"Kelly's got something up his sleeve. We'd better stroll down by and by, as inconspicuously as possible; and maybe we'd better go separately. I'm pretty sure that you'd be safe enough alone just now, because, for certain reasons, the gang's very much on its good behavior for the present—particularly toward anybody in the good graces of the Spanish cavalier."

She gave him a laughing look and a comprehending nod.

"I can invent a perfectly good excuse to go down there," she responded. "And I'm not afraid. Last night I was really scared for a little while, but now I feel quite at ease in the lion's den—or the ant's nest. Do you suppose he really bites?"

"You bet! Deep, hard and quick, if he feels like it."



THE arrival of servants with breakfast broke off their conversation. Both ate eagerly. Before they were half through, however, Mendez arrived.

"*Capitán*," he said hurriedly, "I have discovered that the sweetch in your boat is in bad order. Your friend, the other man, says you can make a quick repair. I could do it myself, naturally—I am engineer officer—but you perhaps can manage it more quickly, as you know this particular boat better than I. Let us go immediately."

Hart eyed him, noting signs of nervousness.

"The switch is not in order? Hum! That is serious. You have notified the general?"

"I—no, *Capitán*. It is not necessary, since the matter can be made right. Let us go—quietly, without disturbing him."

"Ah. Well, I shall see what can be done, after breakfast. You will join us?"

"No, no. I ate earlier. Let us waste no time. You shall finish your meal when the repair is made—"

"I finish one thing before starting another, *hombre*. Take a seat."

Despite the impatience of the lieutenant, the meal proceeded with exasperating deliberation. Hart suspected that Kelly had sent the fellow in order to get rid of him; so he dawdled, meanwhile probing the other with questions and showing much concern over the mysterious ailment of the switch, until the snippy officer was in a nervous sweat. As a matter of fact, Kelly had not desired this delay. It served one good purpose, however; for, if Mendez had thought there might be any prearrangement in summoning the blond man, the suspicion was banished by the latter's laziness in starting. When at length Hart deigned to arise, the *teniente* almost ran in his eagerness to be gone.

"Follow on," Hart muttered to Jean as he departed.

"Soon."

Taking his time, he passed out. At the door of the office he glanced in, finding Veinte Cuatro absorbed in some discussion with several others. Outside, those who looked his way saw that he was escorted by Mendez and soon forgot him.

Down in the launch, Kelly had been making exceedingly good use of his time. First he had tinkered uselessly, making a show of activity, until the curiosity of the new sentries had worn off, meanwhile informing the world that some sanguinary son of abysmally degenerate denizens of unnamable resorts had ruined the motor in the night. His lurid language evoked appreciative grins from the outlaws and satisfied them that there was little need of intent vigilance on their part. Wherefore they looked longingly for some near-by shade, found none, and fell to growling. They had missed their breakfast, it seemed; and now they must stand in the blazing sun (rapidly rolling higher and hotter) because of that sleek pup of a Mendez. They were exceedingly sour just then on the life of a *revolucionario*.

Kelly took this in and looked them over, dallying with the idea of making them allies. But he decided against it; they looked too treacherous. So he tinkered again. And, as he tinkered, he proceeded with cool audacity to replace the switch.

This work he masked by keeping his burly body between switch and watchmen, pretending meanwhile to be engrossed in fiddling with the battery. He fastened it firmly, connected up the battery, and even made a tentative test. At the responsive burr he instantly disengaged it; and as the sentries caught the sound and peered quickly toward him he straightened up and swore a blue streak at the boat in general and the battery in particular. The guards chuckled gruffly and looked away. The Americano was having the —— of a time trying to fix his boat, *cra!*

"And a good job done," muttered Kelly. "That *teniente* is such a simp he won't even know the switch is back; or if he does spot it I can kid him out of it. Wonder where Hart is. Ought to been here before now."

He got out his priming can and set it handy; laid a hand on the engine, finding it well warmed by the slanting sun; put the gear in reverse. Another burst of oratory for the benefit of the guards. Then he turned on them and, with manner purposely offensive, ordered them to wash off the muck left on the fore deck by the feet of their fellows. The appropriate response was immediately forthcoming, to the effect that he could wash it himself or go to Hades with it. After a further interchange of compliments he took an empty can, crawled out, and went to washing the paint—with his right hand. His left rested on the prow to steady himself; and in it nestled a small pocket-knife with a keen open blade.

A stout piassava rope, running from the boat to a stump ashore, held it secure. The strength of this bond now became materially weakened, as the concealed blade stealthily cut through strand after strand close to the bow. When it had been bitten almost apart, Kelly desisted from his labors, returned inside, and fanned himself until Hart and Mendez arrived.

"At last we are here," announced the perspiring lieutenant. "Now the repair—at once! *Capitán*, what is it that must be done?"

"Took ye long enough to git him here, I'll say!" grumbled Kelly. "Did ye tell the big boss about this?"

Mendez squinted, saw that the question was meant for him, and scowled.

"Speak what I can understand!" he rebuked. "I do not comprehend English."

"That's what I wanted to know," retorted the other in the same scolding tone. Shifting to Spanish, he continued— "I asked why you did not bring me something to eat."

"Eat? Am I your servant? Eat! *Cra!* This *capitán* of yours has eaten enough for both of you. Now, *por amor de Dios*, let this cursed boat be adjusted!"

Hart, after one sweeping survey of the interior, turned a quizzical eye on Kelly. In a rising tone, as if asking questions, he said:

"You've got your nerve. All set and ready to go, eh?"

"Yeah. This guy's so ignorant he don't know the diff." Kelly pointed accusingly at the engine. "Tank full o' gas, more cans in reserve, all connections made; I even tested the ignition. And the rope is cut; hangin' by a hair. If we can git Miss Jean aboard—"

Hart shook his head and wrinkled his brow as if confronted by a perplexing problem. But what he said was:

"That's all fixed. She'll come down as soon as she can. Trust her to work it. Meanwhile we'll stall."

He moved over to the battery box and began fingering the wiring. And Mendez, self-styled expert engineer, looked straight at the ready switch and away again, unaware that he had seen anything at all. So far as matters electrical were concerned, his brain was as lifeless as the wires in the captain's hand.

X

JEAN waited exactly ten minutes by her watch. Meanwhile she roughed her hair into wispy disorder. When the moving pointer reached the proper point on the dial she walked composedly to the office.

As she entered, Veinte Cuatro happened to be staring straight at the doorway, his eyes blank with thought. They focused at once on her, however, and automatically he arose. She paused within the doorframe, giving him a hesitant smile.

"General," she said before he could speak, "I should like to go to the boat and get a few personal belongings. I know I look most unpresentable, and I do not like to remain so. But it would not be safe for me to walk alone among your men, would it?"

Cleverly phrased, that question. It aroused instantly his pride of control.

"Not safe? Señorita! You may walk unattended among the men of Federico Gordo without the slightest fear. Any man of mine who so much as speaks disrespectfully to you shall answer to me, and well they know it! Indeed you may go to the boat. But—" again gleamed the sudden twinkle under the bushy brows "—if you make yourself look more charming than at present, señorita, I fear that you will devastate my army!"

A merry laugh acknowledged his gallantry.

She blushed a little, too, and for an instant her gaze dropped before his bold regard. Then she recovered her nonchalance.

"Then I warn you, sir, to prepare for devastation. You have seen me only at my very worst, and I intend to make radical changes at once. When I return, beware!" With another little laugh she turned and walked out.

He stood a few seconds looking at the empty doorway, the smile still in his eyes. All at once those eyes sharpened, as if with half-born suspicion. In three long strides he was at the outer door, watching her. She was swinging lithely away with head high, ignoring the men who squatted, sat, or stood along the street; a proud, cool figure, showing neither haste nor concern, nor once looking back. The men, most of them now full-fed and jovial, eyed her ardently, and more than one of them arose or turned as if meditating advances. But not one of them spoke. They glanced warily toward the door whence she had emerged, spied there the tall form and ominous face of their master, and were dumb. After she turned the corner—still without a backward look—Veinte Cuatro slowly returned to his treasure-table.

Even in the next street, beyond sight of the general, no man directly addressed the khaki-clad young woman, though a number of them exchanged broadly admiring remarks which made her color deepen. Nor did any one follow her. As Hart had predicted, the gang was temporarily on its best behavior. No man cared to have any complaint against him lodged with the ruthless general just now. So, unaccosted and unmolested, Jean passed to the boat.

"Just in time, girlie," Hart welcomed her. "Have any difficulty?"

"No." She glanced at the attentive Mendez. "He can't understand?"

"Not a word."

"Well, I'm supposed to be obtaining personal effects and dolling up to devastate our mutual friend. And I told him I couldn't pass safely among his men, so he sent me alone to prove that I could. Now what do we do? Anything?"

"I'll say so," affirmed Kelly. "We're goin' to devastate yer black gorilla quicker'n ye think, unless somethin' slips. Jest a little more flimflam work and we make a break. But don't let on."

As he spoke he was lifting the top of a box seat beneath which, as he knew, she kept a travel set of toilet articles and other belongings; and, as if she had asked him to do so, he handed her the leather case. Seating herself insouciantly at the bow, she drew out mirror and comb, and, propping the glass at an angle, proceeded to arrange her hair. Mendez, hitherto watching faces and striving to interpret tones, smirked and relaxed, although he did not at once withdraw his attention from her. In fact, it took a peremptory summons from Hart to bring his mind back to the supposedly refractory ignition.

By this time the poker-faced partners had implanted in the brain of the spurious expert the idea that the mysterious "sweetch" was some sort of metal arrangement belonging at the top of the battery, the function of which was to diffuse electricity between the connecting wires; that without it the current would not flow unless, by some hook or crook, it could be coaxed to life; but that if the frozen power could be made to come alive, for even the veriest fraction of a second, it would run merrily thereafter. Ever since the arrival of the ostensible captain of the craft the pair had apparently been seeking some way of giving the necessary impulse to the circuit. Actually they had, while performing weird stunts about the battery, been laying out their plan of ensuing action, meanwhile turning an occasional misleading Spanish phrase in the direction of the lieutenant—who, looking wise, assented to all they said, but ventured no suggestions from his own profound experience. Now, while Mendez's observations oscillated between the ugly battery and the attractive señorita, they kept up their pretense for a few minutes longer. The sentries, who had manifested extreme interest in the launch since the arrival of Jean, gradually relapsed into drowsiness.

All at once Hart straightened up, his face brightening as if a sudden solution had occurred to him.

"A hairpin, Jean," he demanded. She tossed him one. He held it solemnly in the sun; touched it to the engine; held it in the sun again, and drew it along the wiring. As he took it away, Kelly surreptitiously threw over the switch. At the responding buzz both voiced exultant exclamations.

"One of those simple things of which a man seldom thinks," Hart told the mystified

Mendez. "No doubt you have heard of it, *teniente*, but forgotten it, as we did. The radioactivity of the sun and the electricity of the hair combine in a loop of wire to break up static."

"Oh my Gawd!" breathed Kelly. "That's a hot one!"

"Uh—ah—why, yes, certainly, *capitán!* Stupid that we are! And now, *válgame*, at last the sweetch is in order, yes? And the boat will run?"

"I think so. But we had best make sure. We shall make a test. Kelly, prime her.

* * *

KELLY worked with speed. Up the hill, men were beginning to come toward the port. Mendez, seeing the hurried priming of the engine, stiffened suspiciously, slipping a hand to his revolver; then, recalling that the boat was roped to the shore, hesitated. Up forward, with heart beating like a trip-hammer, Jean managed to continue her toilet with every appearance of unconcern. Hart, getting his hand on the steering-wheel, turned the rudder hard to starboard and held it so.

"You'll have to get this bird," he said quietly. "I have to hang tight to the wheel—"

"I'll nail him." With a grunt Kelly rocked the flywheel. The spark caught. The boat bucked sternwise. The rope snapped. Mendez, caught unready for the backward motion, tottered. Kelly lunged into him headfirst, seizing each wrist, butting him in the body, knocking him down and falling on him with crushing force. The launch sheered away from the bank.

"Down, Jean!" snapped Hart. She slid from seat to floor.

"Kick this guy!" panted Kelly. "Make it snappy!"

Hart shot a hard toe under the ear of Mendez, who went limp. Kelly released his wrists, disarmed him, and scrambled up.

"Stop it!" he bawled in Spanish. "Stop the engine! It is running backward! The boat will blow up! *Maldito!* We shall be killed!"

The yell was for the benefit of the astounded sentinels, whose rifles had automatically leaped up, but who stared along the barrels in indecision. They were so near that, if they did fire, they could hardly miss. Kelly, still bellowing, made show of yanking violently at the gear lever, without actually moving it at all. Jean, hugging the floor, took cue from his example and began screaming as if mortally afraid.

To the bewildered pickets, who had been unable to see the swift manhandling of their *teniente* in the bottom of the boat, everything indicated an unexpected calamity. The big Americano had sprung away from the engine in alarm and collided with the lieutenant, and both had lost their balance. The one-armed Americano was leaning helplessly on something. Everybody was scared, and the infernal boat was running crazily backward, going in a circle. All was happening so fast that they had no time to reason things out. The *teniente* was still aboard; he was armed, and was giving them no orders to shoot; and the execution of Luis and Rafael for shooting a stranger without orders was very vivid in their memories. Wherefore they stood as if petrified while the boat wheeled farther and farther outward.

Not until the launch had described a semicircle and was well away from shore did Kelly shift the gear or Hart alter the helm. Then, with her nose pointed seaward and the weight of the current on the stern, she darted away down the Orinoco, a speeding target hard for any rifleman to hit. And thereafter, while a mob came tearing down the hill and the paralyzed pickets still gaped, the three Americans gave their farewells in their varying ways.

Hart sat down comfortably and gave the town of Caicara a wide grin and a deep chuckle. Kelly put a thumb to his nose and wagged thick fingers at the running raiders. And Jean, arising and leaning over the side, blew a saucy kiss in the general direction of the headquarters of Federico Gordo, Spanish cavalier.

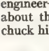
"Ta-ta, old dear!" she caroled.

And then, lying back with the wind rushing through her hair, she laughed in joyous abandon.

"Jest like takin' candy away from a kid, wasn't it, hey?" gurgled Kelly. "And all the kink's hosses and all the kink's men can't never catch up with us three again. Sure, I'm a pote. But what'll we do with this?" He nodded toward the supine Mendez. "It's kind of under foot, and we don't need it. Will we drop it overboard?"

"Oh, no," dissented Hart. "Why be

ungrateful? It would be tough on our old college chum back there to lose his expert engineer—especially since he's learned all about the radioactivity of hairpins. We'll chuck him ashore somewhere."



KELLY guffawed; then abruptly fell silent, squinting back. Across the swash of dividing waves thumped a ragged volley of rifle-shots. Silvery spurts of water leaped up here and there astern. Too late, the raiders had opened fire. Among the forms bounding down the hillside was distinguishable one bigger than the rest, furiously jerking its arms on high as it ran and roared. Veinte Cuatro, the Black Ant who had forborne to bite when he could, now was clashing his jaws in deadly rage.

The trio in the boat tensed and crouched; then, as more bullets skittered astern, relaxed. They were out of range.

"Jest another o' them salutes that these guys seem so fond of," grinned Kelly. "Too bad our rifles are back there, or we might give 'em many happy returns o' the day. But all we've got is this guy's popgun, and— Aw, wal, we're through with all that kind o' rough stuff, ain't we, Hart? Peaceable sailormen, that's us."

With mocking flourishes of the hand they settled down to easy riding of the rollers. Steadily the town receded, soon to be blotted from sight by intervening trees.

Mendez opened his eyes, stared, staggered to his feet, and gaped around him; then slumped down on a seat and almost wept. His fate was sealed! These treacherous schemers would hand him over to some federal garrison! He could not swim, and even if he could the crocodiles would get him. There could be no escape. Woe, misery, despair!

When at length the boat headed shoreward again, stopped at an uninhabited spot, and gave him access to freedom, he was astonished; but his exit was accomplished with agility and alacrity. Once aground, he straightened into a semblance of his former importance, and the look he gave his captors and liberators was anything but pleasant. But he spoke never a word.

"Tell the general," instructed Hart, "that we are desolated by the necessity of depriving him of his boat; but, as a man of experience, he must understand how important it is to our purpose. Tell him also that, because of our kindly feeling for him, we have removed the señorita before she could devastate the forces of liberty and justice. We thank him for his hospitality and wish him a fond reunion with his worthy brother. And while you are walking back to the town, *teniente*, meditate on the fact that a hairpin can sometimes give a man an unexpected shock. Tell the general about that; and tell him to beware of hairpins and of those who use them. *Adios!*"

With a mirthful gurgle of the exhaust, the launch backed, swung, and sped away. Mendez hissed something under his breath and, red-faced, turned to his hot, hard tramp along the shore.

The sun, rolling steadily to the zenith, paused at its peak of ascent to survey things below. It saw the engineer officer, sore-footed and sore-headed, trudge wearily into Caicara, look about, and quietly lose himself among troopers embarking in a fleet of canoes. It saw those canoes, laden with men and spoils, lengthen into a great water-snake and begin swimming northeastward, heading for an unraided town leagues down the river, on the other shore; a snake on whose nose rode a big, ugly-visaged individual somewhat resembling a gigantic *veinte cuatro* ant, whose temper was so savage that none dared speak to him. And, peering slyly into a bat-befouled belfry of the town church, it spied something which, had he known of it, would have caused that black ant instantly to turn back and invade that respected edifice with naked steel.

Up there, quiet as the bats which hung asleep above them, lay two men; one pale, haggard, and hollow-eyed, with three severe bullet wounds crudely bandaged; the other unwounded, wary, watchful, listening intently to every voice and other sound floating up from the streets. The one was the vanished *jefe civil*, Jaime Gordo; the other his faithful servant, the stone-throwing Claudio. By what route these two had reached their hiding place they alone knew. It was a cunningly chosen retreat, however, and the last spot in all the town likely to be suspected. Perhaps, if Veinte Cuatro had remained longer, even this odd corner might have failed to shelter the refugees. But it was not ordained that he should stay. So only the prying sun saw the stoic pair, and that sun did not betray them. At its next rising it was to find them once more in their usual abode, fervently hoping never again to see either the implacable *revolucionarios* or the intractable Americanos.

Having observed these things, the blazing god of the daytime took one glance backward. Away at the east, surging sturdily down the river, danced the launch which on the previous noon had limped gaspingly into the port of Caicara. Wide and free before it stretched the open road to Ciudad Bolívar, stronghold of federal forces and seat of a governor who, instead of putting El Tigre and El Toro against a wall, would speed their departure for their own land. Nowhere along that flowing highway lurked any menace to boat or passengers. And the voyagers, with minds already forgetful of the recent past and dreamily visioning the near future, were lounging in wordless fellowship.

So the sun, at the top of its arc, jestingly loosed an extra blast of heat on the over-hot head of Federico Gordo, shot a wicked wink of light into the eyes of Jaime Gordo, darted a streak of back-fire at the burbling launch, and rolled on westward. On the Orinoco another twenty-four hours had come and gone. Noonday proceeded as usual.

GREAT ADVENTURES OF THE SUPER-MINDS – MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

by Post Sargent

Author of "Hugo Grotius

OLD Algiers slept. Kabyle and Moor, Jew, Arab, Negro, renegade Spaniard—all the polyglot scourings of the Mediterranean coasts—were sunk in slumber.

Above, in the Kasbah, or citadel, that crowned the city heights, their Turkish overlords for the moment were at peace with the world. The Dey, regent of the grand seignior and his janissaries in Turkey: master of life and death. The Diwan, supreme council, lawmakers and as often lawbreakers. Beys and khalifs from outlying districts, come to bring bloodstained tribute. Harems for all; fat Turkish wives, fair Georgian or Circassian concubines, Greek, Italian and Frankish maidens—sea-wrack!

In the prison pens below the Kasbah, or inland beyond the city walls, Christian slaves slept fitfully, huddled on their litter of filthy straw. For Algiers was a pirates' lair, to which the whole world paid tribute in spoil and human lives.

From the bay below, mounting to the fortified walls of the Kasbah, ran several steep and winding streets, the thoroughfares of Algiers. Close on either side, leaving only space enough for two or three men to walk abreast, were the flat-roofed houses of tile and sun-baked clay that formed the town. Vast rabbit warren. Each hutch a dwelling that exhaled human sweat and the odor of offal.

A chain clanked. At the doorway of one

of the houses a face peered out. A body followed. Slowly, for the gyves on hands and feet made movement difficult and painful, the man made his way to a small stone that served as bench beside the door. The African moon, still shining faintly, hinted at what the daylight would more fully reveal in the man. A man—surely young—of average height, with lithe and muscular frame. Aquiline visage, dark hair, the lofty brow and steady eyes of the thinker, large arched nose, long mustache that shaded a humorous mouth, the face framed in a beard that had the sheen of gold. One hand—the left—was maimed and seemed quite useless.

Such was Miguel de Cervantes, destined to occupy a place in the rolls of the intellectually mighty beside Dante, Shakespeare, Homer and their like. In a score of nations where profound thought and brilliant humor are treasured and put into imperishable form by the genii of the printing press, the "Don Quixote" of this same Cervantes is held a book of transcendent worth.

Cervantes gazed wistfully down toward the bay whose nearer shores were faintly etched upon the deeper murk. Several small ships, part of the pirate fleet, were moored just off the shore, their position shown by a few riding-lights. Beyond, to east and north, a monstrous void, black and sinister, without visible movement, yet seeming to pulse and swell, engulfing the unseen horizon in its maw.

The Mediterranean! Cradle and graveyard of the world since mankind began its march from savagery to civilization. Phœnician, Egyptian, Turk, Greek, Roman, the trading cities of Italy and the Hanseatic League! Egyptian baris, Greek penteconter, Roman trireme, Byzantine galandre, Scandinavian drakkar, Portuguese carack—galley, caravel, galliot, felucca, lugger, brigantine—frail chips of wood that sailed and sunk here in the infancy of navigation.

A light breeze, forerunner of the dawn, brought from somewhere on the black shore the rustle of palm fronds to the ears of El Manco de Lepanto—the "One-Armed of Lepanto"—fôr as such a score of generations was to know Cervantes. The watcher remained oblivious to the gentle breeze and whispering foliage. His eyes were plunged into the impenetrable gloom that stretched the half-thousand miles to the shores of Spain.

His imagination, if not his vision, seemed to wing its way across the far-flung space. A smile, half tender, half humorous, played for a moment on his lips. The present and future were effaced—Cervantes was in Spain again. His lips moved. A listener would have caught these words, perhaps the epilogue of the scenes enacted in his memory—

"*La fuerza de la sangre!*"

The force of blood! Home ties—the call of kin! A phrase that now tugged at his heart and was, years later, to serve as title for a charming tale, fresh from the racy soil of Castile and Andalusia.

A good and kind man, his father, but poor and improvident, eking out a wretched living for a brood of seven hungry brats. So he, Miguel, fourth child of his father's brood, had wandered forth as soon as he might into the world, to find his own living and view the marvels and horrors of that kaleidoscopic century of wars and far discoveries.

Gaunt years! Still, years of buoyant youth, when learning could shelter with hunger and romance under the same patched cloak. Then the open road had beckoned to Italy, where learning had sprung to new life amid the ruins of ancient Rome. Where adventure called in the train of the armies of Italy and Spain that massed to repel the Turk.

Cervantes pensively studied his mutilated hand, before letting his memory take wing again.

Seven years had passed since that October day of 1570. The Battle of Lepanto! He recalled vividly the little Greek harbor, with the town nestling in its groves of olive trees. The Turkish fleet converged to meet the combined naval forces of Spain, Genoa and Venice. Below decks, tossing on a bed of fever, a Spanish lad heard the cannonshot that announced the beginning of the combat. Struggling to his feet, he had entered the combat against the advice of his comrades. There he had fought valorously and had won the praise of his captain. This lad was Miguel de Cervantes.

The dreamer glanced again at his useless arm. He carried his sound hand to where his ragged shirt gaped open on his chest. He caressed two deep scars, mementos left by gunshot wounds. At least he, Miguel de Cervantes, had done his part to smash forever the waxing power of the Turk in Europe.

More soldiering and finally the homebound trip to Spain in 1575. But just off the coast of France, near the mouth of the Rhone, his ship was beset by several vessels manned by Algerian corsairs. Despite a valiant resistance of sixteen hours, most of the Spaniards were killed and Cervantes was made prisoner and brought to Algiers.

One of twenty thousand Christian slaves! All the harrowing tales that Europe had heard from ransomed captives of merciless hardships and wanton cruelty were true. In chains and dungeons, some; under duress and constant espionage, all! Road laborers and quarry workers, driven by the whips of vicious bosses. Yoked with cattle they tilled the soil or pulled the water wheels for irrigation. Always, lurking in the background, were the horrors of death by crucifixion, impaling, or unmentionable mutilations.

A noise in the doorway startled Cervantes from his reverie. Another man crept out and squatted by his side against the wall.

"Ah, 'tis thou, El Dorador! What dost thou here at this hour?"

"The heat and smell within are the bane of sleep," the newcomer muttered. "Besides, I would know more of this day's enterprise. 'Tis not just that I should fetch and carry and daily risk my life, while you who scheme and plot—"

"Have patience, El Dorador! Today, an all goes well, thou wilt reap reward for thy services. But one head—and that mine—holds all the plan. That head alone is forfeit, if aught goes amiss."

El Dorador grumbled, then fell silent for a moment. Finally he burst out again, shifting his attack to other ground.

"How think you to succeed this time, when God and nature played you false a short year ago? Are your plans more sure? Or is life less sweet? Why risk the lives, not of one, but of scores and hundreds, when by waiting chance may play your game?"

There was a passionate ring in Cervantes' answer.

"WHEN I realize that I have a master as cruel as thou well knowest, and that I have no means of gathering through alms the ransom he demands of me; when I consider the unendurable life I suffer in hunger, nakedness, weariness and cold, I am determined to die by flight rather than to live this life of misery."

El Dorador sneered.

"I was not in Algiers at the moment and know not the details, but methinks your plans were not well laid. Many others must have suffered from your mistake."

Cervantes replied with dignity. There was a sharp edge to his voice that made the other cringe.

"Nay! You wrong me by such speech. Alone I suffered for my failure, as alone I might have escaped, had I not listened to the voice of compassion. My plans were well laid to journey westward nigh an hundred leagues to Oran, where a ship would wait to bear us to Spain.

"Ten pounds of good biscuits I had secreted; also a paste of flour mixed with honey, and well-baked; and herbs with salt. With a Moor as guide we set out. Alas! I might have known that one who sells himself for gold will play the Judas part a second time. The Moor deserted us."

El Dorador cast a furtive, startled glance at the speaker and made an inarticulate sound in his throat. Cervantes continued without heeding the other's interruption.

"Our bread was soaked through, our garments and shoes torn, our courage spent. Footsore and tormented by hunger and thirst, we could no longer advance. I no longer knew the way to Oran. In short, though death were the better portion, my comrades were my chief thought. By some miracle we won back to Algiers. Brought before my master, I took all the blame upon myself. Expecting the bastinado and preferring death, I cast defiance into Arnaute Mami's very beard. Inscrutable Providence willed that my life be spared. Derided by all, cruelly treated, and loaded with heavy chains, I have been these many months as thou seest.

"But always I resolved to seek for other means of effecting the purpose I cherish so dearly; the hope of obtaining my liberty has never deserted me. When in my plots and schemes the result did not answer my expectations, without giving way to despair I immediately began to search out some new hope to support me. Today, methinks, our hopes will be realized."

Silence fell upon the two.

Meanwhile the night had given way to the sickly glow of the north African dawn.

Then suddenly, as it seemed, the sun rolled in thunderously, flooding the whole Occident with lambent flame. Miles of the Algerian shoreline lay revealed, with here and there a white villa almost buried amid palms and pomegranate trees.

As if the sun were a signal, squads of Turkish soldiers turned out of the guard-houses at the foot of the slope and at the gate of the Kasbah above. Slave-bosses hastened up with crackling whips. One such came to where Cervantes sat with El Dorador and rounded up his squad, with many oaths and much harsh treatment.

At his command a dozen prisoners fell in to line, carrying the slack of their leg chains in their hands. With a slave-boss leading the way, a couple of soldiers guarding the rear, the slave-gang set out for the gardens of Sidi Hassan, Dey of Algiers, that lay some three miles eastward along the shore.

The spacious estate of Hassan was reached after a weary walk and the prisoners were put to work. The sun rose higher, driving the guards to the shade of the trees, whence they emerged at times to ply their whips on the scarred backs of the slaves. Noon came and with it a short respite from toil. Some coarse cakes were distributed, with lukewarm water ladled from a tub. Then the Christians were driven back to their tasks.

The afternoon passed and the sun began to sink. The air grew cooler and the slaves dared to let their minds wander to thoughts of the coming night of dream-wracked sleep. The guards, wearied of inaction and eager to rejoin their comrades in the evening's pleasures, gave the signal for departure. Juan, a Spaniard from Navarre and gardener of Hassan Pasha, came up to sign the day's report and to give orders for the morrow's work.

A moment of confusion ensued. Some of the slaves threw themselves on the ground to rest; others made bold to help themselves to fresh water at the near-by well. The chief slave-boss argued and protested loudly and Juan, as one in the confidence of his master, waxed violent of tongue and scurrilous of speech.

Finally the dispute was settled, the captives herded together, and the return trip begun. Twilight was settling down as the motley crowd neared Algiers, with the Turks setting the pace. Then only, a casual backward glance of a guard caught something amiss.

"*Bismillah!*" he shouted. "One of the accursed *Giaours* is missing!"

The squad was halted and the count of prisoners made. It was discovered that Cervantes was the missing slave. The other prisoners were questioned. They knew naught of the matter. One, indeed, had seen El Manco resting for a moment in the shade of a bush. But nothing else.

The slave-boss cursed and threatened, but all to no purpose. He wavered between returning to search for the runaway and going on to report the escape. The approaching darkness and the thought of the weary miles behind decided him.

"No matter!" he said. "Escape will be impossible. Without food and water, with shackled legs, the Christian will not journey far. The morning will see him whining for food and mercy at the gates of the Pasha's gardens."

El Dorador had once or twice opened his mouth as though to speak, thought better of it, and at last fell to pondering, as the troop lurched wearily toward the town.

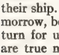
Meantime, behind them in the gardens of Hassan, as soon as the last sound of retreating footsteps had died away, a man's form rolled out from behind a bush and rose to his feet. Another form came to meet him. Juan, the gardener, and Miguel de Cervantes clasped hands.

"All goes well, Don Juan?" asked Cervantes. "Hast seen aught of the promised frigate? If I err not greatly, this is the day of rescue. The days are long and the nights all too short for one in our sad circumstances. With difficulty I keep the tally of the passing days."

The gardener's manner was nervous, his voice troubled.

"Our compatriots, Don Miguel, now to the number of fifteen, are of good health, but a prey to their misgivings. I must report seeming ill news. El Capitán Viana, in command of the frigate and charged with our rescue, did stand off the coast all day of yesterday, awaiting a favorable moment to land. At midnight I flashed the light agreed upon as signal, whereat a boat put off for shore.

"But by sad mishap, at the same point and moment that the boat touched the beach, certain Moors of these parts chanced to pass. These, though the night was dark, descried the bark and straightway began to cry out and call to others, saying, 'Christians! Christians! ship! ship!' So that the sailors were perforce obliged to return to their ship. But courage! This night or tomorrow, beyond peradventure, they will return for us. Captain Viana and his crew are true men and Spaniards, and will not readily leave their countrymen in such plight."



CERVANTES, for a moment, seemed a man discouraged. Then he threw back his shoulders, gave a friendly tap on Juan's cheek and smiled cheerfully.

"*Vaya, amigo! Todo sea por Dios!* God's will be done! Tomorrow is another day, and God watches over his creatures. Lead me now to our friends, for I would eat and rest."

The gardener preceded Cervantes through a maze of paths bordered by trees and shrubs, until they reached a secluded corner of the estate. Stooping, he cleared away earth and leaves, revealing a wooden trapdoor which he raised. At a sharp whistle several faces appeared, peering anxiously up through the opening. Cervantes hastened to allay their fears.

"*Hola, amigos!* 'Tis I, Miguel de Cervantes. Make space below, for I come to cast my lot with you this night."

He dropped through the opening. The gardener closed the trap. For a time the noise of the latter's movements could be heard by those below, as he replaced the earth upon the cover of the cave. Then silence. Cervantes looked around. By the light of a single candle he saw the fifteen fugitives who had been living now, by his planning and Juan's care, for over six months in this underground cell. A word or two of greeting for those who were awake. Then Cervantes extinguished the light of the candle and remained eating his dry cakes in the darkness. Finally sleep overtook him.

That night a boat put out from Captain Viana's frigate that had crept in under cover of darkness. The fugitives, hastily summoned, reached the beach without threat of danger. Several managed to clamber into the ship's boat, before a sudden alarm caused the sailors to push from shore. For suddenly lights gleamed a short distance away, the noise of galloping horses was heard, and a dozen Turks on horses, followed by a score of foot-soldiers, rushed upon the escaping Christians.

Muskets were leveled at the dismayed fugitives; hangers were drawn; the captives saw themselves surrounded on every side.

In the van of the attackers was El Dorador.

Cervantes advanced from the midst of his terrified comrades to face the renegade and traitor, who refused to meet his eye. His words were scornful.

"Well art thou named El Dorador—The Gilder! No doubt this deed of treachery was done for gold. But know this, thou rogue, that if I, or one of these my friends, survives this night, thy life is forfeit."

As El Dorador made no response, Cervantes turned to the leader of the soldiers, one Baxi, and called to him so that all might hear.

"None of these Christians who are here with me is to be holden blameworthy in this affair, for I alone was the sole contriver and the man who prevailed on them to escape."

The Turkish soldiers waited to hear no more. The captives were herded together and driven on their way to the city. Cervantes was bound hand and foot and thrown across a horse. The cavalcade then set out on the return trip.

Hassan Pasha sat cross-legged in the audience hall of his palace in the Kasbah, when the soldiers half carried, half thrust Cervantes into his presence. A cruel smile played upon his lips.

"So, infidel dog, thou didst think to escape with these other *Roumi!* Dost thou not know that Allah's all-seeing vision is given to the leaders of his faithful, even on yonder black shore?"

Cervantes remained silent and apparently indifferent. Hassan flew into a passion.

"Speak up, dog! A year ago I spared thy life. Dost think thus to put to scorn the Dey of Algiers, regent of the sultan, whose name be blessed by the holy Prophet? Mayhap the sight of the slow torture of one of these, thy friends, may serve to loosen thy tongue."

Cervantes sprang to life.

"Sidi Hassan, for myself I defy thy power. Nor am I moved by thy threats of torture. But these men be guiltless. Visit thy wrath on me, for I alone am accountable."

The Dey turned to an attendant.

"Lay me ten lashes on this fellow's back.

Perhaps we can teach him to speak the truth. If not this way, there be other means less gentle and merciful."

A gigantic Nubian came forward armed with a whip. Cervantes calmly watched him as he drew back the lash and prepared to strike. Hassan Pasha closely observed the Spaniard's face. As the whip was about to fall he made a swift sign. The Nubian stopped the whip in mid-swing. Hassan spoke.

"The dog is stubborn. Ordinary means are vain. Let pincers be brought to tear out the nails of his hand and feet. Fetch also hot coals and a glowing iron to sear his eyes."

Cervantes waited impassively while the Moorish servants brought in the implements of torture. A huge brazier of burning coals was placed on the floor a few feet distant from the Spaniard.

"For the last time, wilt thou confess the truth, oh Christian? Or dost thou wish to die this living death, inch by inch—a nail, an eye, a tooth, a finger or toe at a time—while the dawn creeps in to find thee a broken, gasping thing, fit only to be thrown to the dog pack in the street?"

Cervantes rolled up the sleeve that covered his sound arm. Then he answered.

"Dey of Algiers, already have I told thee the truth, the which I will maintain whatever of evil betide me. None of these Christians who stand here has aught of guilt in this affair, since I alone am the author of it. I alone induced them to take to flight.

"Turk that thou art, unversed in the history of most ancient Rome, naught dost thou know of the noble virtues of the Latin race, from whom every true Spaniard claims descent. Among them was one Mucius Scaevola the "Left-Handed," who for sake of country thrust his hand into the sacrificial flame that left his sword arm but a scarred stump. Give but the word and I, too, will cheat these dogs of their pleasure."

He approached the brazier with bared arm. Hassan roared out an order.

"By Allah, this Christian is a man! Slaves! Bear away yon gear! If all were like this *Giaour*, your trade were spoiled."

He turned to the master of Cervantes.

"Dali Mami, you must sell me this your slave. So long as I have this maimed Spaniard safe in my keeping, my Christian slaves, my ships—aye! and the city itself—are safe. "Let the others be returned to their masters. But lock El Manco up in my own dungeons and guard him well. As for yonder Navarrese, my faithful gardener Juan, let him be strung up by one foot from the wall until he suffocate."

THE years passed and Cervantes anguished in the dungeons of his new master, Hassan Pasha, or toiled in the fields and quarries with the other slaves. Undismayed, undaunted, indomitable—for he had the courage of a long line of warrior ancestors, as he had perhaps the prescience of his future claim to supergenius—he never yielded to despair.

Again, in 1579, he planned a quick dash to Spain. This time his plans were perfected with the aid of one Giron, a certain Spanish renegade who professed a wish to return to the Christian faith. Secret negotiations were carried on with two traders from Valencia who had the freedom of the port of Algiers. An armed frigate to accommodate sixty fugitives was actually engaged.

At the last moment the success of the scheme was wrecked by the treachery of a Doctor Juan Blanco de Paz, said to be a former Dominican friar. Let Cervantes tell the story in his own quaint speech:

"All this affair being in good way and of such good promise that it would not fail to come to pass as ordained, the affair was discovered and disclosed to King Hassan, who was of aforesaid Algiers; and according to public and notorious report it was told to him by Cayban, a Florentine renegade, and afterward it was reported to him in person by Doctor Juan Blanco de Paz, native of the town of Montemolin, said to be a friar professed of the Order of Saint Dominic at Saint Stephen of Salamanca."

Brought before Hassan, Cervantes again denied that he had had accomplices. Again his life was spared after threats of torture and death. Much has been made by the pious and by literary critics of his escape from the penalty usually attached to such attempts at escape. It has been suggested that Providence had decreed that he should live on to fill the measure of his genius. It is more probable that Hassan, wantonly cruel as he was, was moved to admiration by the Spaniard's courage and loyalty to his comrades. It is certain, moreover, that the death of Cervantes would have destroyed Hassan's prospect of obtaining the high ransom of five hundred ducats that he demanded for his slave.

A YEAR went by, and at last the poverty-stricken relatives of Cervantes managed to scrape together the sum for which they had striven during five long years. On a November day in 1580 he landed in Spain, with thirty-three years of life behind him, one-third having been passed in military service or in captivity.

The noted English writer, Carlyle, has thus summed up the episode—incorrectly in fact, if not in spirit:

> A certain strong man, of former time, fought stoutly at Lepanto; worked stoutly as Algerine slave; stoutly delivered himself from such working; with stout cheerfulness endured famine and nakedness and the world's ingratitude; and sitting in gaol, with one arm left him, wrote our joyfullest, and all but deepest, modern book, and named it "Don Quixote."

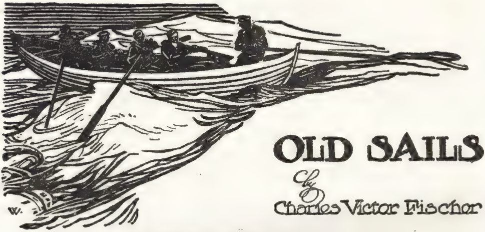
While it is true that Cervantes did some writing in his spare moments in Algiers, he had not yet set pen to paper for the creation of the immortal "History of the Ingenious Knight Don Quixote de la Mancha," nor the almost equally great "Exemplary Novels." Life still held for him, and was to hold, up to the moment of his death in 1616, deep sorrows and trials—yes, and adventures! Playwright and poet, commissary for naval supplies—the great Armada was preparing on a large scale in 1587 for the invasion of England—a constant defendant in the courts of law for the faults of his deputies and superiors; ever needy, but honorable and loyal, he yet found time and courage to ponder over life's whimsies—and laugh. And his ponderings and laughter took strange form in the year 1604.

In the history of man's thinking no creations of the human intellect have caused deeper reflection, or more full-souled laughter, than the illustrious—and mad—Don Quixote, knight of the windmills. Linked to his name, in the world's esteem, is that of Sancho Panza, squire extraordinary. Adventurers both, but in a land of weird whimsicality that has no counterpart in life or other literature.

In the last of his many adventures Don Quixote is made to say—all unconscious of the truth of his statement for posterity:

"This is the day, wherein shall be manifest the good which fortune has reserved for me. This is the day, wherein the force of mine arm must be shewn as much as in any other whatsoever, and in it I will doe such feats as shall remaine recorded in the book of fame."

His fame does indeed remain recorded; and Cervantes, thinker and himself adventurer, was lifted to imperishable renown by the mad and doughty deeds of his creations.



OLD SAILS

By Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Cash Jack," "Frog," etc.

OLD man Svanska, or "Sails," as the three hundred bluejackets on the gunboat *Wheeler* called him, woke up very much on the war-path that morning.

First he growled, a long, rumbling growl. Then, as he snapped to life:

"Go to —— away from here wis your —— yackass yabbering! Do you t'ink das shest iss a seat in dey grand stand at a Shinese execution where you can sit down and shpit tobasco yuice and shmoke cigarets and yabber like so many monkeys in a tree till —— wouldn't have it?"

It was in a forward compartment on the gun-deck, where a section of the deck-force, not many minutes out of their hammocks, crowded about the huge coffee pot that hung from the overhead bulkhead, filling their bowls. Four of them had seated themselves on a chest in an outboard corner. The noise of their chatter woke up Svanska, who lay on deck behind that chest, where he had turned in, boots and saddle, in full liberty regalia, upon returning from his seven days' furlough late the night before.

Seeing that no one paid him any attention, Svanska rose up to his feet, slowly, laboriously, for he was many years from a youngster, and besides, he had been through some heavy physical stress the night before in Shanghai, as was patent from a badly discolored eye, an ugly gash on one cheek and a puffed and swollen underlip. But there was no hint of the infirmness of age or of the meekness of conquered submission in the rasping tone-quality of his voice.

"I say, you rag-shewing hyenass!"

The four gobs jumped up off the chest and swished across the compartment as if blown by a gust of wind.

"You t'ink a man iss talking to hear himself talking!"

Svanska lifted an enormous foot and stepped over the chest. He stood there in bellicose attitude, his hard, wrinkled and furrowed and battered face thrust forward gorilla-wise, his blue and red eyes glaring from side to side. There are not many Svanskas left in the Navy today. He was still something of the fine, six-foot man he had been—though his bones had settled and he was somewhat under six feet now. His hairy chest had lost much of its depth and resilience, and his once broad sweeping shoulders were slightly drooped; but he was still far from tottering age. The locks of hair that showed below the band of his flat hat, which he hadn't taken off on turning in, were snowy white, as were his eyebrows, the tiny tufts on his ear lobes, and also those on the backs of his crooked and bony fingers.

"Yumping Yerusalem," he went on, "a yentleman sailor goess ashore for seven dayss drinking till —— wouldn't have it, and when he comess back to shleep it off on deck behind a shest, where he will bodder nobody, along comess a lot of yackasses wis no better sense as to wake him up! Go to ——, dey whole gang of you, and I'm yust dey feller can do it!"

"Say," spoke up one, "how much of this ship do you own?"

"Think it's a hotel?" another chimed in. "If you wanted to sleep why didn't you turn in down below somewhere? You know our gang get their morning Java here."

"Morning Yava!" the old man exploded. "How am I to know anyt'ing when I am full of yin yuice for seven dayss!"

Off to one side stood a tall, brawny young seaman named Joe Fezer. He had a long, swarthy face, with high, prominent, Indian-like features, a small, drawn mouth and deep-set dark eyes. Just now there was a shrewd light in those eyes, as they narrowly regarded old Svanska. He kept silent for a few moments, while the gang fired good-natured sarcasms at the old man. Finally he spoke up.

"All right, you guys, can it. Take that coffee pot back in the next compartment."

And Joe Fezer being a gob with whom no other gob on the ship cared to have an argument, the coffee pot, followed by a swarm of gobs, moved out. Svanska and Joe then sat down on the chest.

"I wouldn't have let 'em wake you, Sails," said Joe. "But I didn't know you were behind that chest."

He spoke the truth. The fact was, Joe Fezer had been searching the ship for Svanska since one o'clock that morning. Over in Shanghai, late the night before, Joe had heard of a grand clean-up made by Svanska in "Shanghai Charly's" gambling house. A man told Joe that Svanska had cleaned up some few thousand dollars at fan-tan. Joe had made for the ship as the crow flies. But, having returned aboard, hunt as he would Joe had been unable to ferret out old Svanska's sleeping-place. He told Svanska nothing of this now, however.

Svanska grinned as he made reply.

"Yoe, I did not know I wass behind das shest myself, till I woke up dere. I will be dey King of Sweden if I can tell you how I got back to dey ship. I tell you, Yoe, I have had dey finest seven dayss drinking and fighting and gambling— Oh, by yimminy—"

He put both hands up to the brim of his flat hat and then bent over, so that the hat came off bottom side up.

"I say, Yoe, would you look at das money."

Joe's dark eyes glittered greedily. Involuntarily he reached out and felt of the two thick stacks of yellow-backs, which lay neatly alongside each other in the crown of the hat, the ends tucked into the outer, brim part. He made the tactful observation—

"Who did you stick up?"

"Your grandmodder's Aunt Lissie!" chortled Svanska. "But I tell you, Yoe, I can play das game of fan-tan. I hit Shanghai Sharly's place for t'ree t'ousand dollarss, by yimminy. Das wass last night. Oh, dere wass a terrible mix-up, Yoe. Shanghai Sharly wass sore, because I am t'ree t'ousand dollarss ahead of dey house and want to quit. He sayss I shall play some more. I told him it wass getting too late, I yust had time to go to das exshange office and shange my Shinese money for dollarss, and he can go to ——, and I'm yust dey feller can do it.

"Den dere wass —— popping. One feller tried to crack me over my foolish noodle wis a shair. I ducked and give him das knee. Oh, dere wass fun dere, Yoe. Dere wass knives and dere wass pistols and dere wass black-yacks. One yellow-bellied slant-eye tried to cut my t'roat and I t'rew him out of das window. I tell you, Yoe, I am sixty yearss old, but I know a t'ing or two about das fighting game."

Svanska paused, replacing his hatful of wealth on his head. He turned a crafty look on his shipmate.

"I say, Yoe, could you shtand a little yolt?"

With eyes and tongue Joe said yes. Svanska bent over, fumbled a moment in his right sock, then straightened up with a full pint of whisky in his hands.

"And das iss dey beautty of Shanghai," beamed the old man. "A man doess not have to go shneaking up alleyss, and banging on back doorss, and flapping his earss like a yackass to get a drink of das moonshine gasoline dey are selling in 'Frisco for fifty cents a drink. I say, Yoe, knock das cork out."

With short-arm jabs Joe began driving his palm against the bottom of the bottle.

"I say, Yoe," Svanska rambled on, "I am dey happiest yentleman sailor as ever came back from seven dayss drinking and fighting and gambling. I have t'ree t'ousand dollarss in my hat. Dere iss six months' pay riding on dey books. In two weeks more I will finish my t'irty yearss in das Navy, and will retire on t'ree-quarturss pay from our uncle who artt in Warshington. I say, Yoe, iss it so we are going to Vladivostok?"

"Yes," Joe answered, handing him the bottle. "We'll be Siberia bound this afternoon. You'll probably make the next army transport out of Vlady for 'Frisco."

"Maybe I will request to be discharged in Vladivostok," announced Svanska meditatively. "I have a brodder Victor living dere. Yass. Victor iss now t'ree yearss in Vladivostok working on an ice-breaking tug. Maybe we will go back to Wisconsin togedder and start a farm."

"Pretty soft for you short-timers," Joe gloomed. "In the last two months I've put in six requests to be sent back to the States, and the old man tore every one of 'em up. Fat chance for a guy to get married in this outfit. If I don't get back to 'Frisco soon some other guy'll cop my jane."

"And you will be better off, Yoe, if some odder guy doess cop your yane," asserted the old man with philosophic positiveness. "Yanes iss no good, Yoe. You will learn when you are older, dere iss no yane living who will not grab dey feller wis dey most yack in hiss pocket. And dere iss no yane living who can give you somet'ing you cannot buy wis dollarss from some odder yane. My brodder Victor and I wass never married. Wait till you see Victor, Yoe. He iss a great drinking man. We will have a few dayss drinking of vodka wis Victor in Vladivostok. I say, Yoe, go to —— back and bring two cups of das coffee, and we will have some coffee royalss."

JOE went out into the next compartment aft. Svanska sat fondling the bottle. But he soon grew impatient, for Joe was some time getting the two bowls of coffee, owing to a congestion about the coffee pot. Wherefore Svanska decided to start things off with a hooker straight, leaving the coffee royal for a chaser. So he tilted the bottle and gurgled away.

Svanska had a stupendous swallow. So caked and crusted with barnacles was his stomach, stated naval surgeons who had performed some six or seven operations on him, that sulfuric acid would pass through him with no more effect than refined sweet oil. There was less in that bottle, when he lowered it, than there was down in Svanska's deeps among the barnacles. But it was not the drink that sent the reddening accession of blood to the white old head of him that caused his eyes to bulge.

What made Svanska look like a man who had just drunk poison was what he saw out of the corner of his inboard eye. A pair of trousers up to the knees. But the thing about these pants was, there were creases in the fronts of the legs of them. They were no gob's pants. In them stood an officer.

And there sat Svanska with a bottle of whisky in his lap! He didn't look up. There was only one officer aboard who had that sneaky habit of prowling about decks in the early morning hours. Svanska knew without looking that the officer standing there piking him off was "Pickled Onions."

A short, thin, neurotic little busybody with a long nose and a short forehead, Pickled Onions was not much to look at. But officially he sat high. He was the executive officer on the *Wheeler*, hence second in command.

"Well, Svanska—" There was unmistakable delight in the ring of his tone and also in the glint of his fishy little eyes —"this, I'm afraid, will cost you three months' pay. A case for a summary court martial, I should say."

He advanced and held out his hand.

"I'll take that bottle. We'll let the doctor analyze it."

Svanska had his outboard eye on an open porthole. There was his only chance. If he could toss the bottle out through the porthole, he would stand a chance of winning out on a plea of "Not guilty," before a court-martial, since, with the bottle gone, no court could prove he'd had liquor in his possession aboard ship.

"Come, come." The executive came nearer.

But he never touched that bottle. Svanska made a perfect toss, flipped it out through the port. Pickled Onions danced over, and, looking out saw it bob up and down a moment, then fill and sink into the muddy Yangtze. He turned, his thin, sharp face twisted into a wizen complex of ugliness, a wicked glitter in his wicked little eyes.

"Very well," he snapped. "Did I say a *summary* court? I'll take that back. This I rather think will make a case for a *general* court martial. At any rate, *we'll* try! Now you step aft with me to the doctor's room, and *we'll* see what *he* says about your condition."

Svanska paled. He saw that Pickled

Onions still had him with the goods, not *on* him but *in* him. That long drink was on his breath for the doctor to sniff of. The doctor's word would *go* with a court-martial. A summary court martial would not be so bad; it meant only a fine, three months' pay at the most. But a *general* court! A general court martial would demolish Svanska's dream of the future as a sixteen-inch shell would a house of glass; it might mean a term in prison, after a long-drawn-out, blood-sweating process, and that followed by a dishonorable discharge, along with forfeiture of all claim to retirement pay. In a word, the thirty years he had served behind the nation's guns would count for no more than if they had been served behind gray penitentiary walls.

And then, with the return of Joe Fezer, bearing two bowls of coffee, Svanska saw another loophole. Gulp down a bowl of black coffee and kill the odor of liquor on his breath—that was it. Then Pickled Onions wouldn't have a leg to stand on. Svanska reached out and took one of the bowls from Joe. But Pickled Onions was too quick for him. He dealt Svanska's wrist a blow with his knuckles, and the bowl splattered on deck.

A rap on the wrist, from any one, was more than Svanska could stand. Had Pickled Onions been an admiral he would have sailed in.

"What dey —— iss dey matter wis you, sor!" he snarled, and sailed in.

SVANSKA was only vaguely conscious of what happened in those few moments. Joe Fezer blocked him from getting to Pickled Onions. But he quickly shook Joe off. Then on the run came gobs and gobs. They crowded about Svanska, pushing, jostling him this way and that. The old man let drive with both fists, knocking them right and left, but there were more and more coming. It seemed to Svanska the whole ship's company was in that little compartment. They shouted and roared in his ears, but that only heightened his rage and the maniacal determination to clear a path to Pickled Onions and retaliate for that rap on the wrist. They grabbed hold of him from front, rear and sides, but there was no holding him; he had the strength of a gorilla and was quick as a cat.

But they got him, finally. Some one kicked his feet from under him, and Svanska crashed over on deck. The chief master-at-arms, a pair of bright steel bracelets in hand, lunged in and tumbled over on top of him. *Click*. Over and over rough-and-tumbled the pair of them. *Click*, again. The bracelets were on old Svanska's wrists.

Squirming, bellowing like a bull, Svanska was carried below and deposited in the brig.

Svanska growled and ground his teeth, as he tugged at the handcuffs and also tried to pound holes in the brig deck with his enormous feet. The *Wheeler's* brig was little more than a steel casket. He had an area of five by eight feet to move over. There were two holes admitting air and daylight—a barred porthole in the outboard bulkhead, and another hole, three inches in diameter, in the steel door to allow necessary conversation between the prisoner and the guard outside. Otherwise the brig was air-tight.

Not for long, however, was he kept stamping and raging. Pickled Onions had let no grass grow underfoot. Soon the key rattled in the lock, and the steel door of Svanska's casket swung back, admitting the captain and the ship's doctor, both in pajamas. Pickled Onions was in the visiting party, too, but he remained outside with the master-at-arms.

The captain, Commander Holby, spoke first. He was a tall, fine-framed, handsome man.

"Why all the rough-house, Svanska?" he said pleasantly.

Environment might have made of Svanska one of those fourthly-fifthly-sixthly-and-just-one-word-more orators. He drew himself up to the full height of his Swedish dignity and gassed forth sonorously:

"Sor, I have been a yentleman sailor, fighting dey guns of das Navy for twenty-nine yearss, eleven months, two weeks and t'ree dayss. I wass an able-bodied seaman when I came to das Navy. Before das I was in dey British Navy and also in dey Swedish Navy. I wass an able-bodied seaman in das Battle of Santiago, on das *Brooklyn*, wis Commodore Schley, by yimminy. In nineteen fourteen I was manning a machine-gun on top of a building in Vera Cruz, shooting greasers till —— wouldn't have it, sor. And by yumping Yerusalem, I wass not soaking my fingers when it came to shasing das Yerman submariness to —— off of dey seas, sor!"

He paused a moment, holding up his manacled wrists.

"And if yustice holds empire on das ship, sor," he finished, "you will pleasse have dese instrooments taken off."

Commander Holby smiled. "Remove the irons," he said to the master-at-arms.

The doctor then stepped up, placed both his hands on Svanska's shoulders, and looked him squarely in the eyes. But only for a moment.

"Whew!" He staggered back with the first intake of Svanska's breath. "That's enough to knock an elephant over!" He turned and said to the captain, "He's not drunk. But it's within a moral certainty that he's been drinking booze."

"I had only one drink, sor!"

"That was enough," snapped the commander. And then Svanska's visitors left him.

He stood looking out through the barred porthole, a very much worried Svanska. For he now solemnly realized that in this particular crisis the higher-ups had him cold. He had squirmed out of many booze holes in his day. But all those had been booze scrapes—booze only. Now it was different. A graver charge hung over his head. Whether he had actually struck the executive officer in that mix-up he didn't know. But certainly he had *tried to*—tried hard. And that was enough. They had him sewed up on two solid counts.

But that wasn't all. It broke on Svanska now that he was bareheaded. His flat hat, containing his three-thousand-dollar ten-strike, was gone! He lunged over to the door.

"I say!"

The face of the seaman guard appeared at the hole in the door.

"Will you pleasse find out who got my hat? Dere wass t'ree t'ousand dollarss in it!"

"Three thousand!" The gob on the outside stared. "In your hat?"

"I say, will you pleasse send some one to get Yoe Fezer?"

"Sure," and the gob outside turned and shouted to a man aft in the passageway.

Shortly Joe Fezer's face appeared at the hole.

"I say, Yoe," Svanska burst out, "did you get my hat?"

"Your hat!"

"I lost it in das mix-up! Den dey t'rowed me down here in das rat trap, and my t'ree t'ousand dollarss iss gone!"

Joe appeared genuinely surprized.

"Well say, wait a minute," he said; "I'll go up and snoot around."

He returned in five minutes, and handed Svanska's flat hat through the hole, much crushed and trampled—and empty.

"I found it on deck, just as you see it," he told Svanska.

The old man looked at him with eyes bleak and appealing.

"Sure is hard luck," Joe added. "But don't worry yet. I'll keep my eyes open. Maybe I can spot the bird that's got it. Just sit fast—"

"Sit fast! How in dey —— iss a man to sit fast when he iss losing t'ree t'ousand dollarss! And when he hass a yeneral court martial looking him in dey face!"

"Who told you you got a general comin'?"

"Iss it not as plain as das face on your foolish nose? I have been pronounced 'drinking' by das doctor — I say, Yoe, did I wallop das feller Pickled Onions?"

There was something furtive in Joe's manner as he answered.

"Hanged if I know, Sails. I was the first man in front of you when you went loco; but then the gang piled in and I got knocked off my pins. What did the captain say?"

"Only about I have been drinking," Svanska replied, running his fingers through his white hair. "I say, Yoe, go to —— up and find my t'ree t'ousand dollarss!"

"I'll try," promised Joe. "One thing: you can rest easy that your money is on the ship. Whoever got it can't spend it till we get to Vladivostok. We're gettin' underway at noon. Best thing, Sails, is to keep quiet about it; don't say a word to any one."

After he had gone it worked in on Svanska that Joe's manner was not wholly that of a man with a clear conscience. Joe hadn't been able to meet his gaze squarely.

SVANSKA hoped to be released from confinement that afternoon. But he hoped in vain. At noon the *Wheeler* hoisted anchor and steamed down the river. She crossed the bar off Wusung at high water, and then stood away to the northeastward across the Yellow Sea toward Korea Strait. The afternoon wore along. Svanska was not turned loose.

"I say," he questioned his guard, late

that afternoon, "how long do you t'ink dey will keep me locked in dey shtinkingness of das rat trap, for fear I will cut some one's t'roat?"

"Search me, Sails," his shipmate outside answered. "But it's the order of this post to take you up on deck for air any time you say so."

"I will say so yust now."

The guard opened the door, and then escorted Svanska aft along the narrow passageway, up two ladders to the top-side and finally out on the forecastle.

"There you go, Sails," the guard turned him loose with a wave; "help yourself to the air. Just mosey around as if you owned the ship, but don't forget you're my prisoner. Don't jump overboard."

Those bantered words, "jump overboard," stirred queer associations, caused an idea to take root in Svanska's brain-garden. A notion, vague yet subtly tenacious, took hold of him as he walked away forward.

After shambling aimlessly about on the forecastle for a while, Svanska fetched up far forward on the port side, where he leaned over the rail looking down at the choppy sea surging and pounding against the ship's side. The day was as blue-gray and heavy as Svanska's feelings were. The ragged coast of China was fast blending with the leaden sky in the west. In the murky overhead a few sea-gulls hung on to the ship, cawing wildly as they battled against the stiff offshore wind. Cold wisps of spray spurted up and slapped over the old Swede.

A stationary iron ladder, leading from where he stood down the ship's side into the water, caught his eye. For some reason that ladder held his attention. Then looking to his right he saw, several yards forward of him, a coil of line hanging over the rail—a coil of two-inch, which the deck-force had used when hoisting anchor.

Svanska's white head now began bobbing right and left, his eyes dancing between the ladder and the coil of line. Also those words "jump overboard" were dancing around inside his head. That vague notion was now taking form. He chuckled.

"What's the giggle about, Sails?" came over his shoulder.

Svanska turned and faced Joe Fezer.

"Hello, Yoe," he grinned. "I have an idear in my foolish noodle, which iss none of your business."

Then fixing Joe with boring eyes—

"Did you find my t'ree t'ousand dollarss?"

Again that furtive look in Joe's eyes. He couldn't meet the old man's gaze.

"Not yet," he answered, looking at Svanska's chin.

Svanska's eyes continued boring.

"And did you find out did I wallop das Pickled Onions?"

"No. The only dope the ship's writer would give me was that they've got you down on the count of drinking booze aboard ship. He hinted, though, that there are other charges. Hang it, Sails!" he broke off, "don't stand there lookin' at a guy as if you thought he was a murderer! Do you think *I've* got your money?"

"Did I say I t'ought so?" Svanska shot back, his eyes never wavering.

"No, but—" Joe glared him up and down. "Say, Sails, go to ——!" He spun about and strutted away aft. "Oh, yes," he flung back, "the ship's writer says you're comin' up before the captain tomorrow mornin'."

Grinning broadly Svanska watched him strut away.

"Iss das so?" he chuckled to himself. "Your brainss iss full of granulated TNT if you t'ink dey will get me before das captain tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow morning when dey come to das rat trap dere will be no Svanska's neck to put a rope around."

With that he turned and moved forward along the rail to where hung the coil of line. He leaned his body over the coil. The line was about seven fathoms long. If he tossed it in the water, holding on to one end, it would just about reach down on a slant to the foot of the ladder at the water-line, with perhaps a yard or two to spare.

He made one end fast to the rail. The other end he let hang loose. Then he took a chew of Copenhagen snuff.

Svanska's notion was now a full-fledged idea.

SVANSKA spread his mattress on the brig deck that evening, but did not lie down on it. He didn't undress, in fact, save for taking off his shoes and socks. At nine o'clock he switched off the light and sat down on his mattress, chin between his knees, and between swallows of Copenhagen snuff juice carefully weighed and threshed out his dilemma.

He was between two keen-pointed horns. Positive he was that he faced a general court martial; that, if he faced the music, he would go over the road, for a year, perhaps two, three. And that was the hobgoblin in the old man's brain. Losing all he had on the books, his three-quarters retirement pay, his honorable discharge, bad as all this was, could be lived through. But sweep navy-yard streets with an armed marine behind him; or pull a plow through the fields, as he had once seen naval prisoners do at Mare Island; or go through that "Outside! Inside! Close—gates!" every evening in the naval prison on Mare Island, the notorious "Eighty-Four," where the practise was not to make men but to break them. No, sir! Svanska couldn't, wouldn't do it! Uncle Sam was welcome to his thirty years' service.

But Joe Fezer was not welcome to his three thousand dollars. Svanska purposed to recover that money, if he had to squeeze it out of Joe's eyes!

Nearing midnight, above the pound and roar of the water against the ship's side, Svanska heard the long, shrill note of the boatswain's mate's pipe, as he called the mid watch. A little later, "Relieve the wheel and lookout!" Then eight bells, midnight.

Svanska stood up and peered through the hole in the door. In the dimly lighted passageway outside the bluejacket with the eight-to-twelve watch was turning over the duty to the man with the mid. Svanska chuckled deep down in his stomach, as he noted that the man taking the mid watch was Joe Fezer. He waited till the eight-to-twelve man had gone; then he spoke through the hole.

"I say, Yoe."

In the act of lighting a cigaret, Joe jumped.

"To ——! Ain't you turned in yet, Sails?"

"No, and I will die of shtinkingness, Yoe, if you don't take me out of das rat trap. I have to keep das porthole closed for fear I will be drowneded, and I am —— near shoking. Will you take me up on deck for some God's fresh air?"

"Why, sure." Joe had to take him up. That was one of the orders of that post. He opened the door. Svanska shot out and away along the dim passageway like a rabbit, with Joe at his heels.

They stepped out on to the forecastle. It was a dark, starless night. And cold, raw. There was little wind, but the air was heavily charged with icy mist.

"Better break out your peacoat, Sails," suggested Joe, tailing on behind.

"No, t'ank you," the old man chattered back, and kept right on forward. He didn't stop till he came to that point at the rail far up forward where hung that coil of line.

"Puoy!" spat Joe, as a gust of salty and icy spray swept over. "Say, Sails!" He halted. "Wait a minute! Why go way up there? You'll get soaked!"

Svanska boosted himself up on to the rail beside the coil of line.

"I say, Yoe," he chortled, "I call him a —— of a sailor who iss afraid of a little water!"

It was so dark that Joe, hanging back thirty feet or so, could see but little of detail. He saw that the old man had boosted himself up on the rail. But he couldn't see what Svanska's hands were doing about his body.

"Come on, Yoe," the old man coaxed, "let das wind blow dey shtinkingness off of you."

While so saying he passed the loose end of the line around his body, and threw a bowline in it.

"Better get down off that rail," was Joe's return. "A heave of her bow and over you'll go!"

"Iss das so?" Svanska emitted a wild laugh. "And who in dey —— will care, Yoe? Das government will be over a hondred dollarss a month to dey good. Das captain will not have dey trouble of giving me a yeneral court martial. Das shaplain will not have to say how sorry everybody iss; because dey will not have to bury me."

Svanska pushed the coil of line overboard—so that its middle part trailed in the water, with one end made fast to his body, and the other end to the rail where he had made it fast that afternoon.

"And den, Yoe," he added, "dere iss also a foolish yackass on das ship who hass my t'ree t'ousand dollarss, and will not be sorry as I am going."

"Listen here, Sails—" Joe came forward. "You get down off that rail!"

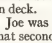
"I say, Yoe, will you pleasse go to ——?"

Joe stepped up and reached out to grab him. Svanska put out one of his enormous feet against Joe's chest and gave him a gentle shove. The ship helped with a lurch of her bow. Joe sprawled over backward on deck.

Joe was down scarcely a second. But in that second something had happened. When he bounced up to his feet again there was no old man Svanska sitting on the rail. Svanska was gone!

Joe jumped over to the rail, leaned over and looked down. But it was so dark that all he could see was the surging turmoil of water. Panic seized him. He went galloping aft, shouting at the top of his voice—

"Man overboard, port side!"



THERE was a snappy officer of the deck on the *Wheeler's* bridge that night. In an eyelid's flutter he reached out and rang *stop* to the engine-room; and while so doing he snapped, "Full left rudder" to the helmsman, so as to throw the ship's stern, her propeller end, away from the man in the water. Then he shouted to the boatswain's mate below the bridge—

"Away, port life-boat!"

The ship heeled far over, under the full left rudder; but she also fell off rapidly in speed, with the engine stopped. She did a complete left-about and came to in a swirling smother of foam.

Six hundred flat feet drummed on the decks below, as the gobs dropped out of their hammocks and made on the gallop for the top-side.

The port whale-boat's crew tumbled into the boat, blocks squealed, rope smoked—and *plop*, she struck the water.

A bright white eye blazed forth up in the mainmast. A moment later one glared down out of the foremast. Then another forward; another aft.

"Down! Down on the water with those search-lights!" the officer of the deck shouted; and the four white rays tilted downward and went flashing to and fro over the water.

Up on the bridge came the captain, the executive, the navigator, the first luff—all the ship's upper brain-works. They crowded out into the port bridge-wing.

"Some one on deck yelled 'Man overboard,' sir," reported the officer of the deck.

"It was me, sir," sang out Joe Fezer from below the bridge. "Svanska, the prisoner, fell from the rail up forward, sir. I had him up on deck for air and—"

"All right, all right!" the captain cut him off. "Tell us about it later."

Then using his hands as a megaphone he shouted to the gobs crowding the port rail:

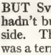
"Silence on deck! Thirty days' furlough and advancement in rating for the first man who sees or hears the man in the water!"

All was excitement. But it was noiseless excitement. Men were scrambling aloft for better points of view. From a little abaft of the forecastle back to the quarter-deck the port rail was crowded with shivering, B. V. D.-clad gobs. Straining eyes followed the search-lights' rays as they played in circles over the water; but all these fell on was the whale-boat tossing among the whitecaps. Whitecaps galore, but no Svanska's old white head.

"I'm afraid he went into the propeller," said the captain to the group out in the port bridge-wing.

"I stopped the engine instantly," spoke up the officer of the deck, "with full left rudder, sir."

"Yes, but there was a time element of a few seconds," the captain replied. "It had to first be reported to you; then you had to ring the engine-room. And then, if he fell from the rail he might have bumped his head against the side."



BUT Svanska's old white head hadn't bumped against the ship's side. The worst he got out of it was a terrific jerk, when he struck the water and the line tautened; but besides having the line fast about him he also had a death-grip with his powerful claws on the part leading upward to the rail.

For a few seconds he just hung on, which was all he could do in such a wild commotion of water; it rushed and roared over him, smothered him. But only for a few seconds. With her engine stopped the ship came around on momentum, and, as she slowed down, the water ceased to seethe and boil, and the old man on the line's end came to the surface. Looking up he saw the ladder. Two hand-over-hand heaves and he had hold of the bottom rung.

When the life-boat struck the water back aft, Svanska was crawling back aboard over the rail up forward.

He had the forecastle all to himself. For when a man goes overboard on a ship under way, all hands instinctively make for the after end of the ship. Quickly Svanska coiled up the line and hung it back over the rail. Then he danced over to the starboard side and, squatting between two bitts in the water-way, took off his wet jumper and wrung it out. This he made into a hood, thus covering his white hair, which in the black of the night would have been a dead give-away.

He didn't tarry long. The gobs crowding the port rail were rapidly moving forward on the forecastle. Wherefore the forecastle was no place for a dead Svanska. He slunk aft along the deserted starboard side. Amidships he descended to the gun-deck. Here he was free from discovery; not a man of the crew was below deck, save those in the engine, fire, and dynamo-rooms.

His first objective was his sea-bag. He must have dry clothes. He found his bag in a few seconds, triced up to the jack-stay outboard on the starboard side aft. Lowering the bag he quickly rummaged out a suit of blues, underwear and a black woolen watch-cap. Then he triced up his bag and, giving all standing-lights a wide berth, made for the next ladder aft that led down to the berth-deck.

He had clear sailing back along the dark passageway to the steering engine-room, which was deep down in the extreme after end of the ship. Here was the safest hiding place on the ship. Only the rats came here. Also it was comfortably warm.

He crawled back in among the bilges abaft of the steering engine, and there began removing his wet clothes.

HAVING shifted to dry clothes he sat back there in the dark bilges thinking things over. So far things had worked out just as he had planned. The rest looked easy enough. It would be no trick at all to remain hidden down here for three days. Crawling down the anchor-chain and swimming to the beach at Vladivostok, pushing his clothes in a wooden bucket before him, would be child's play. He'd pulled that stunt time and again. And his brother Victor was in Vladivostok.

His three thousand dollars? That wasn't worrying Svanska. He would recover that money in these next three days. Sometime between now and the moment he crawled down the anchor-chain in Vladivostok, he would get Joe Fezer—he would nail Joe down somewhere, in some dark place, flatten him out if necessary and drag him down here to the steering engine-room, and then choke the three thousand dollars out of him.

The rumble of the propeller, which was only a little abaft of where he was, and the splashing noise of water outside told him the search for him had been abandoned. The jarring clatter of the steering engine broke on his ears. The ship was once more on her way. His trick had worked.

And yet he was a very blue Svanska. Also he was very much at war with Fate. She had played him dirty, rotten. Snuffed out his lodestar in the last minute! Twenty-nine years, eleven months, two weeks, three days—and *spoof!* Here he was, officially, dead. Lost at sea. He had no further claim on Uncle Sam. That hundred dollars a month that was to have carried him over the Big Divide in comfort was now one of memory's bubbles. *Spoof.* He was better off, of course, than had he faced the music, let them court martial and send him to prison. But it was a small, dirty, miserable trick on Fate's part just the same.

However, he must eat and drink. For the next three days and nights he must live as rats live; he must forage for his food at night. It was now long past midnight. The excitement above had about quieted down, he thought. So he pulled his black watch-cap far down over his ears and neck. Next he reached in under the steering engine and out of an oil drain scooped up a handful of dirty black lubricating oil; this he smeared over his face. His own brother Victor wouldn't know him now. Then he set out forward along the dark passageway.

The first place that suggested itself as a source of supplies was the captain's pantry. This was a small cuddy just forward and to starboard of the cabin. And as the cabin lay directly over the steering engine-room, Svanska hadn't far to go. The pantry was easy of approach and access. Also it was easily rifled. The captain's steward, a little Filipino, slept in there, but, like most Filipinos, was a profound sleeper. And there were toothsome edibles to be foraged there, out of the "old man's" ice-box.

Arriving before the pantry door, Svanska first put out the standing-light there. He took a full minute turning the door knob, and another pushing the door in. Stepping inside he stood there grinning in the darkness. For his catlike stealth was really unnecessary; as well might he have stamped right in. The Filipino was snoring vociferously, and dishes and tinware jiggled and rattled with the motion of the ship.

In a few seconds his pupils focused to the darkness and he made out the ice-box against the forward bulkhead. On deck beside it was a heap of blankets, from beneath which the snores issued. Opening the door of the ice-box Svanska inserted one of his huge paws. It closed on the leg of a chicken.

A choking gasp, from beneath the heap of blankets, as the Filipino broke on the peak of a snore, caused Svanska to step back quickly and crouch down low. He had a whole roasted chicken in hand. The Filipino drew a deep breath, yawned, turned over, mumbling words in Tagalog, and then resumed his nasal music.

And now Svanska heard voices, muffled, indistinct. He strove to localize them. They seemed to come from aft—from the cabin, no doubt.

He catfooted across the pantry. There was another small compartment between the pantry and the cabin, a cuddy where the Filipino made the skipper's cakes and pies. Svanska opened the door leading to this. Instantly the voices became much louder. A threadlike streak of light outlined the after door, the one opening in upon the cabin. He softly closed the door at his back. Then he tiptoed over and listened at the edge of the other door.

The voices were low. He was unable to make out what was being said. He could catch only a word here and there. Seemed he heard his own name pronounced, also Joe Fezer's. Grasping the knob he began turning it slowly.

Click. The mechanism made a noise in spite of him. Svanska held his breath, squeezing hard on the leg of the chicken, ready to make a dash for it. But there was no lull in the voices within. Svanska put an eye to the seam at the door's edge, which had now widened to an eighth of an inch.

In the glow of a green light that shone over a table in the center of the cabin he saw the faces of the captain and Pickled Onions. Pickled Onions wore the crestfallen look of a man under stern rebuke. And by the flash of the captain's dark eyes he was administering that rebuke. Svanska put an ear to the door's edge.

"—exercised a little discretion," the captain was saying. "I never have been an advocate of loose regulations or slack discipline. But in the case of a man so long in the service, why, I can't see that the Navy would have suffered any if you'd turned your head the other way."

"But on top of that, sir," Pickled Onions defended, "he committed the further offense of tossing the bottle out through the porthole."

A silence. Svanska looked through the threadlike aperture and saw that the captain was grinning.

"And then, sir," Pickled Onions added, "he attempted to assault me."

"After you struck him."

"I struck him on the wrist, sir, knocked the bowl of coffee from his hand."

"That was enough to let the old man out on the charge of attempting to assault you," the captain returned.

Svanska thrilled at those words. From the first he hadn't labored under the fear of having actually walloped Pickled Onions. He had *tried* to. And that, from everything in Svanska's naval experience, was enough to bring the tentacles of a general court martial round his neck. Svanska hadn't gone thoughtfully into the details of that unlucky affair. It hadn't occurred to him that the officer had swung the first wallop. He hadn't thought that a rap on the wrist constituted a wallop. That is, officially. It amounted to the same as a wallop in that it called for retaliation, of course.

The extent of his entanglement, then, had been the booze charge. He didn't think the captain would have general court martialed him for that. He might have drawn a summary court martial. Possibly only a "deck" court. Yes; in consideration of his long service, he might have actually got away with it.

Then why in the name of Sweden had he jumped overboard! he demanded of himself. Svanska's barnacles were a-crawl. He was sweating alcohol out of his toenails. He squeezed the leg of the chicken till the oozing juice of it made squeaky, sucking noises.

"Could it be possible that Fezer pushed

the old man overboard?" suggested Pickled Onions.

"No. Fezer was the best shipmate Svanska had," said the captain. "Why, only yesterday morning, shortly after that rough-house stuff, Fezer deposited three thousand dollars with the paymaster in Svanska's name."

"Fezer deposited three thousand in Svanska's name?" Pickled Onions repeated.

"Just that. Said Svanska'd had the money in his hat when he returned from his furlough. Won it gambling in Shanghai, I suppose. Fezer told the paymaster he was afraid Svanska would turn loose of the money foolishly in Vladivostok. Requested 'Pay' to hold the money till after we get Svanska paid off and on a transport bound for San Francisco."

Svanska stood there in the dark little cuddy, the image of despair. His feelings toward Joe Fezer wavered between remorse and resentment. Deeply and poignantly he regretted having judged Joe a crook on mere surface indications. On the other hand he cursed Joe to eternal white heat for being such a brassy young jackass and smart Aleck as to think a man sixty years old couldn't take care of his own money.

Where was he now? he asked himself. The three thousand dollars he had resolved to squeeze out of Joe Fezer's eyes were not in Joe Fezer to be squeezed out of his eyes, but locked in the paymaster's safe. The money was in his, Sharly Svanska's name, yes; but Sharly Svanska was dead, officially, and couldn't collect it. He knew nothing of safe-cracking. Wherefore must he go down over the anchor-chain in Vladivostok, broke.

He had his brother Victor to go to, yes. But Victor was queer in such matters. Victor had always frowned upon Sharly when he came around broke and couldn't buy drinks. The captain was talking again.

"The more I think of this the more I think the poor old fellow committed suicide," he said. "He faced a lot of trouble, or thought he did. His money was gone, he thought. Darn sad shame too."

Pickled Onions nodded concurrence, as an executive officer is supposed to do—whether he shares in the old man's opinion or not.

Thought-worms now stirred and crawled beneath old Svanska's white hair. He saw a way out—or back in, rather. With the silent stealth of the ghost he was supposed to be he would steal forward, crawl back in the brig and shut the door on himself; then undress, lie down on his mattress and pull the blankets over him. And there let the master-at-arms find him in the morning. Overboard? He would blink and stare at the master-at-arms as at a lunatic.

But that idea died a quick death. For, suppose he did succeed in putting it over; where would it leave Joe Fezer? Why, they would forthwith have Joe under medical observation. And often times it's mighty hard for a sane man to convince the doctors. They might send Joe to the Red House. No; it was too cheap a trick.

Then what? Step into the cabin and make a clean breast of it? Aw no. If they hadn't had him cold before, positively they did now. They'd hang him! Not only that. He would be the roaring stock of the Navy. And no more sensitive Swede than old man Svanska ever chewed Copenhagen snuff.

Crash! The ship kicked up her heels and the door banged back in his face, dealing him a blow that sent him sprawling across the little cuddy to crash in a heap against the after door. The roasted chicken flew to a shelf.

"WHAT in blazes do you call this!"

It came from Commander Holby, a man who seldom swore, seldom raised his tone. But there was ample cause for perturbation now. For, as he switched on the light in the little cuddy, there in a heap on deck lay old Svanska, the man whom he had logged "Lost at sea" hours before, his furrowed old face all smeared with oil, blinking up blindly, for the effect of the abrupt onrush of light on his dilated pupils was intensely severe.

Slowly, with the captain's help, the old bluejacket arose to his feet, put out a gnarled hand and steadied himself against a shelf. He took off his watch-cap and wiped the oil from his face. Then he drew himself up to that towering attitude of Swedish dignity for which he was famous among naval skippers, the attitude that was always the forerunner of one of those sixthly-seventhly-eighthly orations.

"I have yump ship, sor," was all he said this time.

Not a gob on the *Wheeler* could learn the inside of that miracle. Svanska and Fezer were the only ones who knew, and they were as tight-mouthed as clams. There was no finding out. They could only guess at things. There had been a false alarm somewhere, somehow. If the old Swede had actually gone overboard, he had somehow managed to get back aboard again. Beyond that lay the Unknowable. At any rate old Sharly Svanska was very much on deck next morning, as usual, puffing away at his reeking old pipe and chewing Copenhagen snuff.

During the remainder of the voyage to Vladivostok, Svanska and Fenzer were as two grown together. Where one moved the other moved. And they ignored every approach to that subject of the miracle. They were like two imbeciles, when questioned on that subject. They would talk, but not to the point. All any one could get out of old Svanska was—

"Wait till I see my brodder Victor in Vladivostok. He will be surprized. I say, I have been drinking and fighting and gambling for fifty yearss till —— wouldn't have it. And now I have reform. I say, do you know what I would like for my brodder Victor to do when I see him? Yust one t'ing. Ask me to have a drink. I say, do you know why? So as I can tell him to go to —— and I'm yust dey feller can do it."

Then Joe Fezer would chime in:

"Wha'd'yuh know about it? The skipper approved my request for transfer back to the States, and I'm goin' back in the same transport with Sails. The jane and I are gonna get married as soon as I hit the dock in 'Frisco."

To which Svanska would add:

"And Yoe and hiss yanè will have a t'ousand dollarss wedding present, by yumpin' Yerusalem, and I'm yust dey feller can do it. I say. Fifty yearss I have been drinking and fighting and gambling, and oh, by yimminy, how I would like for my brodder Victor to say, 'Sharly, have a drink,' so as I can tell him to go to ——."

What Svanska didn't know was that Commander Holby was transferring Joe Fezer back to San Francisco in that transport mostly for the purpose of having someone on hand to see that he kept that resolve, or at least got started right. Had Svanska known that Joe was holding that back on him, Joe would have lost out on that thousand-dollar wedding gift.

LA RUE OF THE 88

A Five-Part Story -- Part I

By Gordon Young

Author of "Days of '49," "Standish of the Star Y," etc.

CHAPTER I

OLD GEORGE

FROM the time that the tall, heavily bearded George La Rue got off the stage in the little adobe village of Perez, with a young wife that appeared haggard and uneasy, and a small bad-mannered boy, until his death nearly twenty years later, he was regarded even in that turbulent country where almost every man's past was shadowed, as a man of mystery; and though he became a successful cattleman, ill-luck like a punishment seemed to fall upon him.

When he came he had money and he knew cattle; and after looking the Basin over he bought a small outfit that held good water in what was known as the Cerro Gordos, sixty miles from Perez. He took the figures 88 for brand, and rustlers found this difficult to meddle with; some tried what they called the "bridle-bit," but the results were unfortunate, or at least so the rustlers thought. Others experimented on his unweaned calves, but whenever the sucklings gave this thievery away La Rue made war.

He was a fighter and seemed scrupulously honest in his dealings with men, nevertheless he was not liked, personally. He was hard to get along with, and unlucky, very unlucky, and this was supposed to have been what made him so morose.

From time to time he was much talked of in the flickering light of round-up campfires and elbow to elbow at cow-town bars. Every one knew just as well as if he had told them in so many words, instead of by wearing a big black bushy beard that hid his face, and by his always watching strangers so closely, that he was afraid somebody would some day find him. He was afraid, but no one suspected him of being cowardly. The opinion grew among the men that worked for him, and none stayed with him long, that he was, at least at times, half crazy—"plumb loco," the men said; and this opinion spread throughout the country.

One day there came into the Basin a fellow who called himself Cunningham, but whom the cowboys soon called "Monk" because he was supposed to look like a monkey, though gorilla would have been more descriptive. He came into the San Arnaz as a puncher, worked here and there, and one day drifted over to the Eighty-Eight, looking for a job.

Soon after this a Mexican boy whipped sweating broncos into Perez about five minutes before the stage left, and Mrs. La Rue, without a word to any one, climbed from the buckboard into the stage. The Mexican boy tossed a valise on the stage rack, and afterward shrugged his shoulders and shook his head when questioned by townspeople. He was honest in saying he knew nothing; perhaps more honest than many another man would have been in not saying something anyhow. Old Hendryx, who owned and at times drove the stage, drove that trip, and afterward told that Mrs. La Rue had cried during the whole day.

La Rue's son, who had grown into a boy of about thirteen or fourteen, and was disliked on all sides, came into Perez a few days later.

Some men of the wrong kind, and there were plenty of them in the country to do that sort of thing, for the off-scourings from other parts of the country drifted into the Basin, egged the kid on to be tough, laughing and praising him when what he most needed was a quirting, or to be tied into hobbled stirrups on a horse that would have jolted some of the meanness out of him. He wasn't thirteen when more than once he had been drunk in Perez, which was then a dirty little 'dobe town.

Though honest men would never have questioned him about his family, there were the other sort that bought the kid liquor—the bartenders would put sugar into it for him—and got him to talk of his mother.

"The old woman, ever since I can remember, she had spells of bawlin' an' mopin' like a sick heifer. She 's been beggin' an' threatenin' for years to go. Hates this here God's country. Cunningham he drifts in an' 's put to work there at the home ranch while Dad he 's over to Wild Horse where some rustlers is whoopin' stock over a back trail. Cunningham he catches sight o' Maw one day—she nearly dies. You 'd think she 's seen a ghost. They has a long talk, an' she sends a greaser kid for the Old Man. Dad comes, an' at first sight of Cunningham he draws, but Maw yells,

" 'Don't! Don't shoot! You 've done enough harm in your life!'

"Then they all go into the house and has a long talk.

"I sneaks up an' puts my ear to the winder. This Cunningham 's got somethin' on the Old Man, I jus' can't figger what. But Maw she carries on more than usual, the which is a heap, fellers, you can bet.

"Later I get round her and ask what's the matter, but she jus' bawls an' says God grant I'll never know what a wicked woman she 's been. An' the next day she left. That's all I know, fellers."

So spoke young Larry La Rue of his father and mother. He was a skinny, dark youth, with a sneer on his young mouth that sagged at the corner as if weighed down by the cigaret always drooping there.

Without doubt Cunningham had recognized La Rue as somebody previously known of whom he knew a great deal. Instead of settling with him as a man of La Rue's temper might have been expected to do, La Rue loaned, which of course meant gave, him the wherewithal to start a ranch of his own.

MONK CUNNINGHAM was just about the sort of man that his face indicated. There were a lot of low-breed bad men in the San Arnaz, and he became right friendly with many of them. More than one of his friends was tied neck-up to a tree; and many folks said Cunningham too should have been helped in the same way as high toward heaven as he was ever likely to get; but he thrived, got along hand over fist, and the first thing the country knew Cunningham was on the way to be one of the big cattlemen.

He at one time openly said that he had La Rue hogtied—"can make the old —— eat outa my hand, an' like it, I can"—and for a time it seemed so. There was never any friendship between them, but no quarrel. Cunningham seemed aware that he had got out of him all that old La Rue would give.

Then one day La Rue had a more than usual hot quarrel with that worthless son of his, and the boy rode over to the Cunningham ranch and said he meant to stay. As one cowboy expressed it:

"The kid's ridin' f'r —— an' he's got more 'n half way thar, I reckon, throwin' in with the Monk's outfit."

At first La Rue said he never wanted to see the boy again, didn't care what happened to him; then, changing heart, rode over after young Larry, and met Cunningham about a mile from the house.

La Rue said:

"I've come for Larry. I don't want you makin' him a —— horse-thief, an' worse."

"Ho, is that so. You 'pear to forget his father's worse. I could tell things, I could!"

"Tell them! I've suffered enough, God knows. I've got to where I don't care what you tell, or who knows."

"I reckon you wouldn't live long if word got about. *He's* still alive, I reckon."

"How long do you think you'd live if

you told enough to give me away? Oh you don't need to look so scared. I won't kill you now, not unless you meddle with my boy. I'm not goin' to have you ruining *him*."

"I may have done some things, but I never stole as many cows as you! I never stole no man's wife. I never robbed my own pardner an'—"

Cunningham found himself looking into La Rue's gun, and begged:

"Don't shoot, f'r God's sake! I've kep' mum all these years. Larry come over here hisself—I didn't git him over. I'll send 'im back. You wouldn't shoot *me*. —— but yo're quick on the draw! It 's expectin' to meet him that 's made you practise. An' I wouldn't a tol' the Missus that time that I'd heard Boyd was still livin' if I'd knowed she would—"

"She," said La Rue, "is dead. She went to my sister back East. The poor woman had no one else to go to. Now I want Larry. He 's going back with me. If that boy doesn't make a man, I'll—I—" La Rue broke off with a hopeless shake of his head.

Young Larry went home with his father, and shortly afterward appeared in Perez. He could not keep faith with any one. He had learned some things about Cunningham's method of making his herd increase, and being cleaned in a poker game and wanting to keep on with the play, he offered to tell a rancher who happened to be in town the location of a secret corral Cunningham had up in the timber where he weaned the rancher's calves. The price was $100. The rancher paid. Afterward he found the corral and raised a hullabaloo, telling who had told him of the corral.

Nothing much came of the hullabaloo, for though there were some of the rancher's calves in the corral at the time—when released they went to cows of his brand—there was no downright evidence against Cunningham, no proof that it was *his* corral. Long experience in various parts of the cow-countries had made him crafty.

But Cunningham was furious, and swore that he would even up with the kid, would some time even up with the whole La Rue outfit. After that young La Rue took much trouble to keep out of Cunningham's way.

It was not quite two years later that old La Rue, who was thought to be more or less crazy, knocked his son down, kicked him, beat him, drove him off the range, out of the country, and swore with black oaths to kill him on sight if he ever returned.

Nearly every one had long believed that old George La Rue had done just about the right thing this time. If the young scoundrel had remained in the country he would probably have been shot by some varmint hunter, if not lynched, as was actually threatened by cowboys who meant what they said.

He had played a smooth game with the pretty daughter of old Hendryx, the stage manager, and had got the girl to steal some money from her father, promising surely to pay it back so she could return the money. For a time the theft made a big mystery. No one knew whom to suspect. Young Larry played fast and loose with the conscience-stricken girl; and at last when she realized that he had never meant to be honest, she got revenge by riding sixty miles out to the home ranch of the Eighty-Eight and telling the whole story to old La Rue. The crazed father cursed his son and nearly killed him with fist and boots, and swore to kill him if again they ever met.

Such was the name and character of young Larry La Rue throughout the San Arnaz.

II

THE San Arnaz Basin, all of it, was hard on men, horses, cattle, but blessed by the cattlemen in that it was worse on nesters.

Here and there the covered wagon crept in, and under the Spring rains the nester tore some patch of rolling lowland with the plough, planted, then watched despairingly and helpless as the sun burned him out. Where the plough broke through the surface strange weeds came clustering up like captive things at last released. They choked out the meager unwatered grain and broadcasted their seed in a way that often forced the nester to abandon his homestead. If he moved on and squatted down behind a fence nearer the fragrant coolness of the mountains, at spring or waterhole, he was also burned out—if not killed outright.

From anywhere near the center of the Basin the distant mountains might appear hid in the evening mists, but the surge of the mountains was felt far out across the land, broken into sandy hills with stony outcroppings. In the Springtime a flush of green lay over the land, and in the green there was a shy twinkling of flowers, but these withered quickly, and the grass dried to its roots. Each little hummock became a tiny haystack, sun-cured, as full of nutriment as a handful of wheat. The cattle fed and thrived—if there was water. Armed men stood guard at water-holes.

There were feuds in the land, and these were fought by the ancient feud-code of nomads. It was not only an eye for an eye, but a life for a rash word, and often many lives for a maverick. In the heat of midsummer, two, three, more, men at times died at a water-hole that cows might drink and so have life and fat.

Then throughout the country came a turbulent change that some men called prosperity. Perez became a railroad town. The railroad put out a two-hundred-mile feeder to tap the cattle shipments of the San Arnaz; and Perez, a track-end town, sat at the tip of iron rails like a lone bead at the end of a long wire.

Thereupon Perez took on more dignity as the seat of San Arnaz County, and became filled with office-holders. These levied assessments and collected taxes, and had a way of growing prosperous while in office. Being peaceful officers they did not greatly meddle with the personal affairs of the county. The Mexican sheriff rarely showed any eagerness to lay a heavy hand on the one who shot first in a fair quarrel.

Perez had been a 'dobe village of nearly all Mexicans whose tiny gardens somehow gave them chile and beans sufficient for the year round; and with the tenacity of those things that spring up in desert places, it had remained alive, though barely alive until the magic touch of iron gave it a name on the map, and made it the track-end town of a cow-country. Cowboys seldom paused to vote; Mexicans remained the most numerous, and politically important. Given a sheriff, they would vote for whomever else Jim Barley, who directed political affairs, wished; and the sheriff did as Barley wished.

Perez had grown into a town of more wooden shells than adobe. The word *paint* meant liquor, not something to smear on wood. The railroad, wisely thrifty, painted its box-car station once a year, and its water tank, bound with great hoops of iron. The color was a dark red, like dried blood.

During the summer wind-storms a dust like that of desolation settled upon Perez. Scorching winds, smoking with dust and herding tumbleweed, rolled over the land, withering everything that was green. But the sky was nearly cloudless except when the winter rains pushed across the mountains and at times flooded the country. Arroyos, nine months dry as empty pans on an oven, became for a few hours rivers, and pent-up little valleys were shallow lakes that rapidly oozed away. When the winds were still the summer sky had a desert clearness, and the night sky blazed with low stars that were as brilliant as those that had made astrologers out of the night herdsmen of Chaldea.

Perez had the uncouthness, and at times the noisy vitality of a frontier town; it was blazingly wild during the Fall shipments, and at other times there were occasional rip-roaring outbreaks, mostly of drunken, good-natured cowboys.

Though the Perez *Mercury* was published but once a week, there was almost daily gossip and excitement to be recorded. In one issue of the *Mercury* there might be the "news," already well talked over, as when the station-master's wife ran off with the hotel bartender, and left a three-year-old daughter for the harassed father to mother. Some said that the inky mustache which had made the bartender appear so fascinating to the frail mother was dyed. The same issue told of a brakeman's stabbing one of the women living in the I.X.L. saloon. No one knew why, but a jury of town folks let him go. Cowboys, learning of this acquittal too late to shoot the brakeman, shot up the town by way of expressing disapproval. In this same issue there was the "telegraphic" news, clipped from a Kansas City or Denver newspaper, about the Buck Harrison gang holding up the Santa Fé right at the Kansas edge of the Arkansas river. For some years that gang had been dodging about through four or five States, here, there, everywhere, and had been through many fights but never wiped out.

There was, however, one country-wide scandal that so far had not got into the *Mercury*. The editor, who was a sickly and not at all a bold man, would probably have been shot had he so much as hinted at the truth, though everybody knew that the younger Hammarsmith brother was carrying-on with the wife of Jake Spencer of the Arrowhead. Spencer was a tough old cattleman, honest and dangerous.

Perez had a school, a church, a bank—the court-house was up over the bank—a hotel of sorts, a dozen saloons and such. The back door of the I.X.L. saloon looked across vacant land to the little church, also used as a school, which was topped by a sharp roof, belfry and wooden cross; and the I.X.L. girls often sat outside in the cool of Sunday evenings, wearing red and purple wrappers, smoking cigarets, and watched the faithful file across the deep sand to the bench pews.

The owner of the I.X.L. was Jim Barley, fat, crippled, and he was the man who ran Perez. Like almost everybody else in the town, he had come in with the railroad, or a little ahead of it. Almost from the first he and Monk Cunningham, who had grown fat and was using a buckboard these days much more than a saddle, had got as close as glove and hand. Barley, being a politician and knowing how to handle things, had got the beef contract for Cunningham while the railroad's construction gang was pushing across the Basin, and Barley had bought an interest in the Cunningham ranch.

III

THERE were at this time in the Basin two young fellows who, largely out of sheer devilment, made Barley, Cunningham, sheriff, court and law much laughed at among the cattlemen. This had come about in a rather odd way, and was illustrative of cowboy recklessness, hot temper, quick generosity, blind courage and sense of humor.

One of these fellows, Tom Walker, had been riding for the Hammarsmiths, an outfit thoroughly hated by Jake Spencer's Arrowhead; and Blade Jones rode for the Arrowhead. Each had courage and lots of it; but both were turbulent youngsters and had got their heads turned the wrong way by much talk among their friends as to which was the better man. It got to where everybody knew that as soon as they met they would shoot.

They met in Perez, in the Santa Fé saloon, owned and run by a wise old-timer who had put in most of his life down on the Border before coming up into San Arnaz. The two wild-headed youngsters met, something was said, out came guns, a dozen shots scattered bystanders through the doors and under tables, but not a drop of blood was spilled. The boys were too angered to think, and in disgust they went at it hammer and tongs, or rather by beating each other with gun-barrels. When pulled apart each swore death for the other on sight.

Not long afterward Blade Jones rode down upon his enemy, half dead and wholly unconscious where a horse with a broken leg had thrown him. Blade Jones shot the crippled horse, cursed the prairie-dog, lifted his enemy into the saddle, carried him some miles off to the nearest bunk-house. As this was a line rider's lodge, no one was about, so Blade Jones got a fresh horse and rode forty miles into Perez and sent out the doctor.

Walker had some broken bones that healed rapidly as young bones do on the range.

Some weeks later Blade Jones was squatting on his haunches in front of the Rock Creek store, which was little more than a place where the stage changed horses and left mail. Though of course at the back of the store there was a plank on two barrels and some tin cups for liquor.

Tom Walker rode up and drew rein. Jones, without an upward glance went on whittling.

" 'Lo," said Walker.

" 'Lo," said Jones, with a slantwise upward glance from an eye's corner.

"I got somethin' to say."

"I got ears," said Jones.

"You got more'n ears, you speckle-faced, doggy-legged son of a gun, you! You got white man's blood in yuh!"

"Yeah? Now what's the matter?" said Jones with half a grin.

"I got an idee. Queer one, I reckon. But I've thought it over a heap."

"I ain't no what you call mind-reader," said Jones.

"Folks say, Blade, as how you ran some little stock with the Arrowhead."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I run nigh twict as many as yuh with the Hammarsmith, the which ain't very danged many."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

They eyed each other half understandingly for a moment, then Walker said:

"Over to Eagle Roost Canyon—you know it—good range for a small outfit. Monk Cunningham holds the water there, the which ain't no good reason why he should keep on holdin' it."

"Unh-huhn," Jones offered non-committally.

"I couldn't join up to take water away from the Hammarsmiths, n'r you to take a hole from ol' Jake Spencer. But the Monk—what d' yuh say, Blade Jones?"

Blade Jones, who was freckled as a turkey egg, rubbed at his nose as if to rub off a freckle or two and solemnly eyed Tom Walker; then tossing away his stick and closing his knife, he stood up slowly, gazed overhead for a moment, and spoke:

"I'm thinkin' some o' ridin' over to Eagle Roost Canyon. Yeah. I hear tell there's good water over there for a small outfit. If I had me a good pardner I might hole up over there an' talk sassy-like to Monk Cunningham. But I got doubts about throwing in with you, Tom. I hear tell onct as how you shot six times at a feller an' missed 'im."

Tom Walker slacked his reins, curved a leg around the saddle-horn and began rolling a cigaret, answering gravely:

"I ain't no what you call scandal-mongrel, but Blade, I hear tell some such story 'bout you. You mus' be a powerful pore shot."

"I reckon they been times when I didn't do no better 'n some other fellers. But I've pondered a heap an' I can't figger how."

"Blade, me havin' nothin' to do f'r some time but lay on my back an' take a pill onct in a while to cure some busted ribs an' sech-like, I've meditated some on that little epysode o' ourn, an' I got suspicions."

"Mind tellin' 'em?"

"That day Pop Murdock didn't by no manner o' chanct happen to git his hands on yore gun f'r a minute, did he?"

"Pop is one good friend o' mine an' he did ask for a look at my gun an' he got 'er."

"He 's a good friend o' mine too, an' he must 'a' done the same thing to my gun. So yuh see why for all the noise we made there wasn't none o' them innercent bystanders hurt, n'r none o' Pop's bottles broke."

"I calc'late," said Blade Jones, "as how when they was makin' of idjits I come along an' got worked on twict. Now what you say? Do we ride to town an' shoot a few holes in the Santa Fé jus' to show Pop as how we can take a joke?"

"The which, Blade, is a good idee, but two things they is wrong with it. One of 'em is that Pop keeps a sawed-off scatter gun under his bar, an' the other 'n is you know blame well he's likely to use it. But if we start now we might git over to Eagle Roost in time f'r supper."

They rode to Eagle Roost, they ran off the Cunningham guard, they chased the Cunningham stock out of the canyon; then, in the course of time, they got in their own cows from the Hammarsmith and Arrowhead ranges.

Barley, Cunningham, the sheriff, the law, all conspired against the new outfit in Eagle Roost Canyon, but Blade Jones and Tom Walker, with a kid puncher or two who were looking for excitement, held their tiny range against all comers. The Mexican sheriff with a posse rode over and held parley from a distance, but declined the invitation to come right on into the cañon and make hisself to home, permanent.

The cow country was downright proud of the boys, but they lived in perpetual danger of being cut off by Cunningham's killers. They had to pay wages to a couple of kids and they had to have grub, their herd was insignificant and what they called their "beef cut" wouldn't have filled a box car.

Then it was that old George La Rue bought that "beef cut" off the boys, practically financing their half lawless game. La Rue was in a position to be independent, and Barley and Cunningham might roar all they liked. His herds were unmortgaged, most of his water was on deeded land, got fraudulently of course through cowboy homesteaders, and he now seemed willing to go to war with Cunningham.

It was while Perez and the country too was still excited over what might come from this quarrel that old George La Rue got his last blow from the ill-fate that had so often struck.

He was in the barroom of the Perez hotel. He had just come from the post office and was absorbedly reading a letter. Of recent years letters in a woman's hand had been coming frequently.

There entered a tall stranger. Strangers were common in Perez these days, but this one would have been noticed and remembered among range men anywhere. He had not come by train or stage; he was a horseman. His high boots were slick where leather had rubbed leather, and his face too looked as if made of saddle leather. His eyes were deep, dark, narrowed, steady. He paused at the doorway, looking the men along the bar over quickly, and his glance had gone to La Rue's bearded face and passed. But at that moment La Rue looked up. He made a queer confused sound as if surprized into speaking a name that he tried to choke back even as he spoke.

On the instant, before the men at the bar had even started to dodge, guns spoke and bullets crossed. La Rue went down face forward, shot through the head, his gun outflung and the letter he had been reading crumpled under his left hand.

The stranger, with elbow crooked, gun muzzle up and thumb on the hammer, looked at the other men in the room. No one moved. They knew it had been the last scene in an old grudge, fairly ended.

Men from other parts of the hotel, and from the street, who had heard the shot came running. The stranger as he put away his gun said calmly:

"Gentlemen, I wouldn't have known him if he hadn't spoke. But he knew I'd come an' he knew I'd kill him. How long 's he been in these parts?"

"Been here nigh twenty year I reckon."

Many voices spoke up:

"—richest cowman in the country, one of 'em anyhow—"

"An' who 's to git his ranch now? He drove off that onery kid o' his ten year ago."

"His wife she left him—"

"He druve her off."

"—allus been unlucky, ol' George has."

"Wonder if that kid o' his is livin' yit? He 'll git the ranch—"

"Livin'? Not much he ain't! Them kind don't live long. Too onery!"

"Yeah, yo're right!"

"Nobody'll git it, then."

Sheriff Aquillar came in, and the men who had seen the shooting, many talking together, told of it. Aquillar was a large man with a slow mind and a staring steadiness in the way he looked at any one.

"My name," said the stranger, "it is Boyd. This man here you all call La Rue done what made him afraid of me more 'n twenty year ago now. It was down near the Border. I never looked for him much, recent years, but I'm mighty relieved we have met at last. And if there is them here that has got anything to say to me about what's happened, say it now 'cause I'm ridin' out from town."

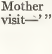
"Boyd," said one, acting as spokesman, "you done what you had to do, an' yuh done 'er clean."

"Good day, gentlemen," said Boyd, and he backed to the door and out.

The men lifted La Rue to carry him from the room. Some one picked up the letter that fell from the dead man's fingers and glanced down at it.

"My ——, fellers—look here. 'Dear, dear Uncle,' it says. 'By the time you get this, Mother and I will be on our way to visit—' "

IV



OLD La Rue had scarcely been put under ground before Jim Barley, owner of the I.X.L. saloon, who controlled the politics of the county, was appointed administrator of the La Rue estate.

CHAPTER II

YOUNG LARRY

A HORSEMAN came over the Needle Peak stage road and through the dusk at a jog trot into Perez. He sat tall in the saddle, and there was nothing of range finery in his dress unless it were the high slim boots, hand-sewed with floral designs.

He gazed ahead with the look of a stranger at the treeless town set down in the midst of bad lands; and trotting noiselessly in the ankle deep dust of the stage road, he appeared to be coming upon the town through a cloud of smoke that stirred upward with listless drifting as he passed.

The Santa Fé Saloon, owned and run by Pop Murdock, was the first passed on entering Perez by the Needle Peak road. The horseman stopped there and carelessly tossed his reins to the ground before the nail-studded hitching rack. He looked up and down the street where here and there a light glistened through the dusty windows, then with clattering scrape of long-shanked spurs he walked to the open door of the saloon.

The Santa Fé saloon was a barn of a room, but an old adobe. Tacked upon the walls were a few pictures from magazines, women of fleshy outline in tights, prize fighters in trunks and crouching with scowls that seem intended to scare somebody. Here and there were lost-strayed-or-stolen notices, giving brands; and yellow fly-specked reward posters from some far-off sheriff. One, larger than the others, more fresh, un-fly-specked, was tacked so conspicuously as to overlap others of less importance:

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

BUCK HARRISON

—and signed by the Governor.

A pine bar, planed smooth, polished dark with much rubbing of the bar towel, ran for twenty feet along one side of the room. There were many circular tables. Low square boxes, half filled with sand, were near each table as a gentle hint to tobacco chewers. Each table had a slot in the center, large enough to admit a dollar; and it was through this that the poker players played their tithing to the house, the kitty going for drinks.

A poker game was now going. The players, beginning in the afternoon had forgotten supper. A few townsmen stood by, watching, for most of the money was being taken by a very young boy with pink cheeks and bright eyes. The other players were a lanky storekeeper, a drab slope-shouldered little man with an over-hanging mustache who was the editor of the Perez *Mercury*, and two cowboys. One of these was a large man with small eyes, one eye was almost closed in a squint that gave his glance a perpetual look of menace.

Pop Murdock, slow of movement, heavy on his feet, with a face hardly more expressive than a boiled ham, leaned on the end of the bar and impassively watched the players. He could see nothing of the fall of the cards, but he watched.

At the sound of the peg-like tread of heels and jingling scrape of spurs, Murdock looked slowly round to where the horseman had paused; and, with a sort of dull expressionless stare, Murdock eyed him carefully from hat to heels, noticing that he was brown and lean, black-haired, and that there was a faint curious twist to his mouth, something like the beginning of a smile that would not be pleasant.

"A bad *hombre*," said Murdock to himself. "Young, but he's learned."

Then with the deliberation of a big man who has flat arches, Murdock moved up along the bar to serve him.

"Bourbon."

"Unh-huhn," Murdock offered by way of reply, and put out a bottle and glass.

The man poured a drink, sniffed suspiciously, tasted, and replaced the glass. He spoke softly:

"Maybe as how you don't hear well. I said Bourbon."

"Son," Murdock answered just as softly, "if you know corn juice that well, you're shore unfortunate. In these parts we sell whisky. It ain't got no first name."

The fellow's glance was ominously steady, then his lips moved slightly with a twisted smile. He drank and replaced the glass noiselessly.

"My name," he said, "it is La Rue. Laurence La Rue. I ain't really a stranger to these here parts but I been away. Yuh've heard tell about me?"

Murdock grunted vaguely and a look of interest showed for a moment on his impassive face:

"Yeah, some. We've been wonderin' if you'd show up. 'Bout time yuh got here."

"I've been 'way a good many years, 'pears like. I'm not much at 'memberin' of names an' faces, but I think they'll all come back, give me time. Have you been here long?"

"Like 'most ever'body, son, I come in with the railroad. Nobody 'peared to know jus' where yuh was, an' some allowed as maybe yuh wasn't goin' be found."

"I been South. I been many places, not allus where I could hear the news. Many ol' timers hereabouts?"

Murdock paused thoughtfully, watching this fellow, then:

"Can't say as they is. In ten years they's been a lot of changes. Perez, she's a big metrop'lis now. New outfits on the range. Yore paw he was the oldest timer hereabouts, 'r one of 'em. Jake Spencer he's still in these parts. Me an' Jake was acquainted quite some years ago. You 'member him I guess?"

La Rue nodded.

"Yore paw," Murdock repeated, "he was 'bout the oldest timer, an' nobody much could stay long near him, as you learned, didn't yuh?"

La Rue, with a look that was warily distrustful, nodded.

"Then there's that greaser, Juan Hurtado. He give out as how he'd seen you lately, an' that yuh was comin'. An' of course there's Cunnin'ham. 'Member him a little, don't yuh?"

"A little, maybe. Yeah."

"Me, I never knowed you personal, son. But from what I hear, I'd say you was changed some."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Some."

"Sure me an' you are teetotal strangers?" La Rue inquired.

"Shore. But folks they talk."

"What they say, Dad?"

"Lots. The which is a habit folk has. As yore father he was a big cowman they talk heaps, wonderin' of where yuh was an' would yuh come. You 'pear to have changed."

"So? Just how, Dad?"

"They say as how you used to take whisky jus' as she come, plenty too much f'r a kid."

"What else they say? Tell it to me just as if I was somebody else. Go on, Dad. Give a glimpse o' my repytation."

"It won't flatter you none."

La Rue's glance brightened, he grinned a little.

"Awright, let's hear."

"There's some as says yuh wasn't much good with a gun, them days."

"Well? Maybe as how I still ain't."

"Unh-huhn, maybe. Son, I was down on the Border nigh thirty year. An' offhand, jedgin' from what I've seen o' folks, I'd say yuh was a feller as could shoot a little."

"A little, Dad. But I'm peac'ble. More. A bit skittish—like a woman. Guns goin' off make me jump."

"Yeah. You look timid."

"What else do folk say, Dad?"

"Yore paw, he was a most accomodatin' man, some ways. If anybody, they was lookin' for trouble, ol' George he'd shore accomodate 'em. They say, some folks, as how you wasn't much like him that away. You *was* powerful timid, them days."

"Maybe that was because I'm so peac'ble. Peac'ble men they get misunderstood."

"Unh-huhn. I reckon. An' I wonder do yuh know folks say as how yore father run you off the range."

"What do folks think was the matter, Dad?"

Murdock's heavily lidded eyes gazed expressionlessly at him, then, low-voiced, dull of manner—

"Yuh was a worthless, lyin' sneak an' low-down coward—so folks say."

A glint passed across La Rue's eyes, then he smiled.

"Yeah, Dad?"

"Un-huhn, the which ain't half of it."

"Go on, let me hear the rest."

"They say—" Murdock paused and looked toward the poker game where the larger cowman, the squint-eyed one, was blasphemously cursing his luck. For a moment Murdock seemed about to move down along the bar, nearer the game, and say something; but the cowman's voice dropped to a sullen mutter, then there was silence as a new deal began.

"They say," Murdock resumed, "as how if ol' George La Rue had made a will he shore as —— would have cut you out. But it 'pears he didn't. So you an' that there cousin o' yourn can squabble over the ranch, her claimin' old George meant 'er to have it, an' you bein' the son. They are out to the ranch now, them women. Slab Saunders there—" waggling a thumb toward the poker table—"he's foreman."

La Rue turned and looked at the big man who was angrily playing in the midst of bad luck.

"What you say is his name, Dad?"

"Saunders. Slab Saunders." Then, with heavy lidded watchfulness he added slowly: "Quite some bad man, Saunders he is. Got a couple o' notches on his gun."

"Yeah?" La Rue inquired mildly.

"Yeah," said Murdock, impassively scrutinizing La Rue who stared toward Saunders.

"He shore looks bad," La Rue commented.

"He's worse'n that, Slab is. Unh-huhn."

"Work for my — for ol' George long, did he?"

"No, he never worked none f'r yore paw."

"Friend o' yore's, Dad, this Saunders?"

"Pays f'r what he drinks."

"Good cowman, is he?"

"There's some as says so."

"Well, what do you say, Dad?"

"Son," said Murdock blandly, "I'm a

barkeep. I ain't none interested in cows much—'r women a-tall. But I speculate a heap on men sometimes. Because I reckon yuh can see things from my side the bar the which ain't visible from the side you're on. Saunders he's got the name of a bad man, an' there's them as will step sideways pretty *pronto* so as not to bump agin him; an' some agin as won't. He's been a-workin' for Cunningham, who you shore ort to 'member. He was put in as foreman o' the Eighty-Eight 'cause Jim Barley 'pears to think him a good man an' cowman. But me, I'm a barkeep an'—"

"Where can I find Barley? He's one man I want to see."

"Unh." Murdock grunted doubtfully. "Friend o' yourn, is Barley?"

"Is Barley a friend o' yourn, Dad?"

"Well now we don't cross the street to keep from speakin'—nor to speak. An' we don't shout cross the street, neither. He lives mostly down to the I. X. L., up the street a piece. Keeps women there."

"Barley's administrator, ain't he?"

"Unh-huhn. In these here parts he's jus' about ever'thing, 'r tries to be? You knowed him quite well, did yuh?"

"Never seen him, Dad, as I remember. No."

Had La Rue been noticing carefully he might have thought that the expression in Murdock's eyes seemed to say, "You're a liar." But as La Rue turned away what Murdock said was:

"If you're goin' now, yuh might as well pay f'r them drinks you had. I'm some notionate as to who has drink f'r nothin'."

La Rue twirled a gold coin on the bar.

"An' I'm some forgetful, Dad, with so much to think about right now, y' know."

Murdock eyed him, openly, carefully, then with no haste counted out the change. Handing it back he said:

"You've changed I reckon a lot. There's somethin' 'bout you that makes me think o' some folks I knowed long ago, an' most forgot. Now it ain't offen as how I treat, strangers 'specially. But you an' me 'd better have a little drink together."

"I'm 'preciative, Dad."

"Yuh ort a-be," said Murdock, and lifting his glass, added, "Now here's luck, Son, 'cause I got a feelin' as how you're shore fixin' to need 'er. An' me bein' long toward sixty, an' you a long ways yet from half o' that, I'm jes' suggestin' as how you'll find life a heap more worth livin' if yuh think careful an' go slow."

La Rue eyed him with a glint of distrust, and with quiet menace inquired—

"Meanin' jus' what?"

"Jes' what I said, son, I don't meddle much outside o' what goes on here in my place. No." Murdock shook his head slowly. "Not much with *nobody's* doin's. Not even Jim Barley's."

La Rue replaced his glass, looking hard at Murdock in a way that showed he was a little mystified and suspicious; but Murdock said nothing more, and had looked away, putting the whisky bottle on the shelf behind him.

La Rue turned toward the door, but paused, then went near the poker table and stood by, looking carefully at Saunders, foreman of the Eighty-Eight. No one noticed his coming. The young city boy was the only one who played in luck, and he cheerfully plunged into every pot. La Rue watched the game as if ready at any moment to leave.

Murdock moved down to the end of the bar, nearer the poker table, and leaning on his elbows watched La Rue and meditated:

"—he ain't no more La Rue 'an I am. But he's shore got all the earmarks of one bad hombre. I bet it's some o' Jim Barley's dirty work, gittin' him in here to be the heir—"

ADAMS, the sickly newspaper editor, was in shirtsleeves, and his shirt grew more and more moist as his losses grew. The storekeeper, with an air of dejection, picked up hand after hand, shook his head sadly and grumbled that nobody ever before had such luck.

The boy played foolishly and won often.

Saunders, an ill-tempered loser, time and again threw his losing hand angrily at the table so that cards skittered as if in fright to the floor, and the players had to fumble about and pick them from under chairs before the game went on. Over and over Saunders turned his menacing look on the boy who was a stranger to all the players.

A jack pot lay on the table. Saunders, with an air of anger, opened and stood pat. The pink-faced boy came in with a four-card draw.

"Gosh," said the sickly newspaper man, fingering the discards, "that kid 'll win 'er.

He don't know a thing about poker. Just has luck. —— such luck!"

Saunders bet; the boy raised; other hands went into the discards. After rises back and forth, Saunders, with all of his money on the table, spread out a full house and reached for the pot. The boy said, "wait a minute," and gleefully invited him to gaze at four kings.

"I knew it! I sure knew it!" said the editor in weary vexation.

Players and on-lookers were muttering in wonderment at such fool luck when Saunders, half rising from his chair, clapped one hand on the scattered coin and with the other thrust a gun across the table.

"You —— onery card - rustler, you! You can't git away with that on me no more. I seen yuh steal 'em. You've been hidin' out cards when yuh pertend to pick 'em off the floor. If you wasn't a kid, I'd plug yuh. One yap outta yuh now an' I will! Now you git up an' git outta here—plumb to —— outta the country!"

The boy had jerked himself back, gasping, frightened, half lifting his hands:

"I never stole—*me?*"

"Yes, *you!* I been watchin' you. This here's my pot," said Saunders, spreading his fingers and pawing it toward him. The thumb of his right hand rested on the cocked hammer of his gun, and his gun was pointed at the boy's head.

"I never stole nothing—in my life I never stole! I—I—are you men going to let him rob me?"

The boy's face was strained almost to tears, he was that startled and angered.

Murdock straightened up, watchfully, then paused, waiting.

The editor started to protest, but his courage was not equal to his sentiments, and chewing rapidly on a mouthful of tobacco he bent over, taking a long time to spit; but the storekeeper under lowered lids looked enviously at the pot Saunders, by right of conquest, was clawing toward him. The bandy legged cowboy, one of Saunders' men, muttered—

"Each feller does his own argufyin' in this here country."

"Four cards and four kings—that's too raw," said Saunders, scowling over his gun. "Whar you come from that may go, but not—"

Saunders' voice stopped; he stiffened, but made no movement, and his eyes took on much the same sort of stare as if he felt himself turning into stone. Something unmistakably blunt and chill was pressed against the back of his head, just behind an ear.

"Keep quiet, *quiet,*" said a soft voice, "an' let that hammer down easy!"

There was a jerking scrape of chairs and a quick backward movement from those about the table, and their eyes turned on La Rue.

Saunders lowered the hammer and dropped his gun. He crooked his elbows, half raising both hands.

"Here!" cried Saunders' man, the bandy-legged dark-hued cowboy, "what the ——"

"Steady there, Pete! Steady!" said Pop Murdock from across the bar. "Let 'em kill their own snakes!"

"What you mean," Saunders cried, glaring up from the corners of his eyes, trying to see behind him, "what you mean, drawin' on a feller's back?"

"She's safer. Near as safe as drawin' on a kid."

La Rue reached over and picked up Saunders' gun, and with a gun in each hand looked quickly from face to face of all about the table; then—

"Yore name it is Saunders?"

"You've heard o' me!" Saunders answered, warningly.

"Some—if you are the Saunders what used to be on the Eighty-Eight."

"I still am! I'm foreman!"

"No you ain't. You been fired. I'm foreman now. Yeah."

"*You?* Who the —— are you? You're crazy!"

"So I been told. But me, I'm La Rue. Larry La Rue."

Everybody excepting the city boy, who was a stranger and did not know about the missing heir of old George La Rue, popped their eyes a little wider. Young La Rue had been greatly talked of, wondered about, and nothing heard of him had caused anyone to think he would be the sort of man to make a gun play against such a fellow as Saunders, even to Saunders' back. Saunders would surely kill him, later.

"Down where I come from," said La Rue, "fellows that want to steal somethin' stop the stage—or hold up trains. They don't pull guns on lucky kids in a poker game. An' I don't like to see a growed man throw his cards on the floor, then 'cuse men of cheatin' that pick 'em up."

As he spoke La Rue again, as if half expecting trouble from the onlookers, glanced warily about him at the faces of those who watched him.

"You—La Rue?" asked Saunders as if stunned, his arms half crooked with hands half lifted. Then, dully, "Cunnin'ham said you'd never—" He stopped.

"Jus' what did Cunnin'ham say, huhn? I'm a heap interested I am."

"You'd never show up—you daren't! That he knowed where you was, all 'bout you!"

"Yeah?" La Rue asked with just a bit of thoughtfulness under his insolence. "All right, you ride out an' tell 'im I'm here if you want. I'm La Rue—that sticks, an' yo're fired. Now I'm goin' down the street a piece, but I'll be back. I'll jus' leave this gun o' yourn at the bar. When you get all calmed down an' speak nice, maybe Dad there'll give 'er back to you. That is, if he wishes you some bad luck."

As La Rue moved up to the bar he kept his eyes on the men about the table. He was alert and watchful, but there was a lack of nervousness in his manner that Murdock, who had seen many a bad man make his play, remarked very carefully. He laid Saunders' gun down at Murdock's elbow.

"Dad, this here gun has some notches on 'er. Shame, don't yuh think, that a man don't take more pride in a good six-gun than to nick 'er all up that away?"

"Son," said Murdock, looking steadily toward the poker table where Saunders sat in angered helplessness, and the men about him gaped in a sort of unfriendly astonishment, "son, you're one o' the ol' time breed, but I don't think you're goin' get away with all you're tacklin'!"

But La Rue, not pausing to listen, had backed to the door; he paused there, then disappeared. A moment later those within heard the plunging gallop of a horse.

"He's gone!" some one yelled.

Saunders sprang up, sprang toward the door, snatching at his gun as he went.

"He's gone! The blankety-blank! Draw when I wasn't lookin'—an' run!"

"Don't fret none too excessive, Slab," Murdock advised in a heavy slow tone. "He'll be back. Them kind don't run far."

"How d'you know? You know *him?*"

"Yeah," said Murdock, thumping down the bottle that had been called for, scattering glasses before the men. "I know the breed."

The men drank, some of them repeatedly and deep; they talked hurriedly in confused phrases through which Saunders' curses rolled. His drinks were filled to the brim, his threats loud and many.

"Look here, Pop," said Adams, the sickly editor. "Why did you sort of take that fellow's part? Some of the boys might have called his hand. Pete here was gettin' ready, but you spoke up the way you did. Just why, Pop?"

Voices stopped as the men waited for Murdock's reply. It came slowly:

"Two things, Adams, you don't 'pear to understand. One of 'em is, that La Rue feller can shoot. The other'n is that he likes it. An' I'm gettin' too old an' stiff in the joints to take much pleasure any more in scrubbin' the remains o' fellers like you offen my floor, so I—"

Adams had a weak stomach. Too much greasy food and whisky during the hot weather had made him queasy. He reached with frantic grab for the whisky bottle and shuddered as he drank.

"Slab," Murdock continued, eying Saunders, "as a cusser you're first-rate, but there are times when cussin' don't help much, like now. You are gittin' yoreself all het up, an' likkerin' mighty hard f'r a man that's goin' a-have to shoot quick. Now you have got some repytation in these here parts as a gunman, an' maybe as how you've got a right to the same. Speakin' personal, I don't know. Now that other feller, I never seen him afore tonight, but I've seen them as is like him. They was quite some plentiful some years ago down along the Border. Mostly they died young an' went out shootin'—a-laughin' queer-like as if dyin' was fun. As a bad man, Slab, longside o' them kind, you ain't no more 'an a grasshopper to a rattlesnake an'—"

"Look here, Murdock, I don't like the way you talk!"

Murdock gazed imperturbably into Saunders' ominous frown, and Saunders' squinting eye was closed as if to concentrate the glow of anger in the other eye. He repeated the significant emphasis:

"I don't like the way you talk. Understan' me?"

"In the which case, Slab, if I was you, I'd set down over there some'ere's an' meditate. You might beat an' ol' man like me on the draw, an' agin you mightn't. You can suit yoreself about experimentin'. But in a friendly sort o' way I'm pointin' out that tonight yore luck it is shore bad—know who that kid there is?"

Murdock leisurely pointed a thumb toward the end of the bar where the city boy stood by himself, half timid but curious, listening.

The men turned and stared at the boy.

"Who is he, Pop?" asked Adams.

"No, we don't know 'im," said one.

"Looks more like a girl 'an a kid," said another.

"Friend o' yourn?" Saunders inquired hostilely.

"Not pertic'lar, no. But it sort o' happens that his uncle is ol' Jake Spencer o' the Arrowhead—"

The men shifted about with scrape of heel and craning of neck to look more carefully at the city boy. There was certainly no resemblance between this pink-cheeked lad and gnarled, hard-spoken, waspish old Jake Spencer.

"Him there an' Mrs. Spencer," Murdock continued in a heavy monotone, "she is back from her trip East. Her an' the boy they come in on the train 'safternoon, an' him there, moseyin' 'round to see the sights, he drifted in here."

"Jake Spencer he is yore relation?" some one asked the boy.

"He's not my uncle. He—my sister married him. We came in this after—"

Murdock interrupted:

"Son, yore part in this here conversation is mostly silence an' lots of it. That there pot yuh won is still on the table. Go back an' get 'er. Then set down by yoreself an' stay there."

The boy flushed, embarrassed. He was the only one in the room that did not know he was being taken under Murdock's protective wing; and all now understood clearly why Murdock had been ready to side with La Rue's gun play. Murdock and Jake Spencer were friends, though they rarely met, and when they did they were as undemonstrative as two old turtles; but they had been young men together down on the Border, and friendships that were knitted in that day and place held for a lifetime.

Within recent years Spencer had married a woman that folks with a sour wit said was young enough to be his "great little granddaughter." Murdock, the impassive, had said nothing in particular about the marriage; but people wondered why he, an old friend, did not let Spencer know about the country-wide scandal that involved Lola Spencer and Cliff Hammersmith.

"So you see, Slab," said Murdock to Saunders who was again helping himself too freely at the whisky bottle, "after this, afore you tell anybody to git to —— outta the country an' stay, you'd better sort o' inquire around regardin' his relations. Ol' Jake an' you not bein' friends nohow, he won't be none too happy for to learn you pulled on this here boy that he likes a heap. Jake he's not quarrelsome, but he's powerful sudden when anybody monkeys with his brand—"

"Heh, is that so!" Saunders sneered. "Well now I begin to see why there's been a party loafin' round here in Perez for two days, waitin'—jes' waitin' I guess for the train to come in. An' Cliff he ain't been waitin' for nobody as wears the Hammersmith brand! I'm not afraid o' you, Murdock! I'm not afraid o' ol' Jake Spencer. I'm not afraid o' that —— La Rue! I'm not afraid o' no —— man! You hear me? Jim Barley he put me in as foreman o' the Eighty-Eight an' I'm goin' stay foreman if there's twenty young blankety-blank La Rue's come a-runnin'! Come on Pete, le's git outta here—" as he talked Saunders backed toward the door—"we'll go over to the hotel where Cliff Hammersmith is stayin' with Lola Spencer—"

As he said it he stumbled hastily backwards out of the door. Anger and whisky had made him crazy. From the darkness he cursed Murdock and Spencer, and called loudly to Pete, "Smoky" Pete, the bandy-legged cowboy, telling him to come on, that they would go over to the hotel, get a couple of drinks, then go lookin' for that blankety-blank La Rue.

"Pete," Murdock called, and Pete paused at the door. Murdock spoke slowly, gravely, "Pete, you fellers want 'o be mighty precautious how you look f'r that feller, 'cause if you ain't you're liable to find him!"

Pete answered with curses and strode through the door.

"Saunders 'll be dead 'r dead drunk 'fore midnight," said Murdock calmly to those at the bar.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING ICE WATER

IN THE I. X. L. saloon a woman in a red wrapper leaned on the bar, idly shuffled a beer glass and talked to a slender dark man, rather too well dressed, who, though he paid no attention to what she was saying, answered with an air of boredom:

"Yeah—That's right—Unh-huhn—

"—she's a fool, Mack. That's what I say. Don't you? Jake Spencer's a knock-kneed piece o' sour crow bait to look at, but he's good to 'er. Too —— good, don't you say, Mack? A woman's a fool to care about a man's looks if he's good to 'er. But Mack, why the —— is it a woman don't ever have no sense till she's been batted around, huhn? I guess we're like cows, have to be roped, throwed an' branded. Ain't that so?"

"Yeah," said Mack again, indifferently, and gazed at the fingernails of one hand, then the other.

The bartender, under a lantern at the other end of the bar, leaned over a month old Kansas City newspaper, reading down one column then down the next, going through society items, market reports, foreign cables. As long as it was print he read and believed.

Supper-time was a dull hour in the I. X. L.; townsmen were eating and such visitors as chanced to be about did not begin to celebrate until along later in the evening.

Old Hendryx, owner of a livery stable and the Needle Peak Stage, an old broken man, very near-sighted except with his glasses on, was on the piano stool, slowly striking chords and listening blissfully. He knew nothing of music, did not know one note from another, but he liked to fumble childishly with the piano, and when so occupied he paid no attention to what went on around him. Old Hendryx was plumb crazy, and every one knew why.

The other person in the saloon was a young red-headed cowboy, rigged out in colored silk shirt and fancy chaps. He sat alone at a far table, whistling low and idly, wondering about what to do next and where to go. He was new to the San Arnaz country, and having been into a two-handed stud game with Mack was now penniless. Mack had tried to coax him into taking a loan on his long-shanked, silver inlaid spurs; but the red-head had answered:

"Feller, yo're a nice little boy an' I don't harbor no griev'us feelin's 'cause you was fortunate. Money it ain't worth nothin' less you spend 'er—but you get down to my wearin' apparel, you 're gettin' clost to my hide, the which is some precious. So now speakin' perlite, yuh get to —— away from here now an' leave me alone. Savvy?"

The dainty-fingered Mack had withdrawn good-naturedly, carefully so, for he sensed that the red-head was very nearly in a mood to entertain himself with some quick shooting.

Now the red-head, with his neck resting on the back of his chair, gazed toward the low ceiling and whistled softly between his teeth, keeping time to his own tune by waggling his toes.

La Rue stepped through the door, paused, then to the bar. Nora and Mack turned casually and looked him over. Red-head, who had an untroubled conscience, did not so much as twist his neck. Lynn, the bartender, began to fold his paper, asking—

"Yore pleasure?"

"Is Mr. Barley hereabouts?"

"Why no," said Lynn, "Barley he ain't in right this here minute, but I 'low he 'll be here *pronto*. He's feedin' hisself over to the hotel now. Was yuh wantin' to see him perticular, 'cause Mack here he tends some to Barley's bus'ness—"

La Rue gave Mack a long look, then:

"It's perticular. I'll wait for Barley. Bourbon."

"You bet," said Lynn, and reaching under the bar brought out the bottle reserved for Barley and his friends, such as the Mexican sheriff, the county judge, Cunningham.

La Rue tasted the glass, nodded appreciatively, paid, and glass in hand moved some few feet up the bar, and stood alone.

"Been a nice day," said Lynn, not intruding but ready to show a sociable spirit to all customers.

"Has it?" La Rue inquired.

"Yeah," said Lynn, and feeling that the stranger was not eager for conversation, again opened his newspaper, and spreading his elbows bent forward.

Thumm-umm-bumm-mm-m. Old Hendryx experimented with deliberate enjoyment on the reverberant keys of the piano.

Red-Head whistled softly. Mack was daintily trimming his clean fingernails; and

Nora, silent for a time, dabbled a finger in the spilled beer thoughtfully, as if meditating upon the need of women to be roped, thrown and branded.

Lynn, half lying across the newspaper, turned his head and called—

"Hey Nora, they's a piece in this here paper about yore cow-stealin' friend, that there Buck Harrison."

Nora's reply was instantaneous and unladylike. It was one of Lynn's jokes to call the notorious Harrison her friend and a mere cow-thief. Nora had once been on a train that Harrison and his masked men stopped; and if her account of the experience was true, she had some reason for thinking kindly of the outlaw.

Nora was a dark girl with a hardened face and a whirligig of a tongue, and she was subject to occasional outbreaks that made the men stand about helplessly wondering what to do with her. Officially, so to speak, she sat in the lookout chair for the I. X. L. faro game, and often took the box. The chief grievance that Barley and Mack had against her was that she would not touch a crooked box. An odd twist to her sense of honesty, or dishonesty perhaps, brought this explanation:

"I 'll lookout over a squeeze when a man deals, but I won't touch the ol' thing. Me, a woman, dealin' crooked—if the boys catch on, they can't do nothin' but feel bad. A man—they catch him, they can shoot him. But a woman, no—it ain't square."

She went up behind the bar and leaned by Lynn's shoulder, looking under the double-deck head-line at the item to which his finger pointed. It was from a correspondent down at Tucson and said that Buck Harrison and his gang had been chased below the Border, and that the governor of Arizona was going to try to get President Diaz to order his Rurales to capture the outlaws.

Nora had been reading aloud. She broke off contemptuously, slapping the paper as she turned away.

"Oh but now I can have a good laugh any time I want it—greasers bein' told to catch Buck Harrison! A good many American sheriffs have been told to do the same little thing. Some they have got so clost as to see where the Harrison boys have been, an' that's about all. You 'member about that time, Mack, when they caught one of his men in some little town way off from the railroad over in New Mexico, and the deputy sheriff from Los Vegas rode over to see if it was one o' the gang? 'Member? You remember, Lynn, 'cause you read the papers as you ought to read the Bible. Old Harrison stuck the deputy up, took his star an' papers, went on in an' got them fellows to turn over the man to him—an' they rode off together. You," Nora asked of La Rue, "remember that, don't you? Ever'body talked for a time."

"I ain't never been 'round much where people talked," said La Rue, regarding her attentively. "This Harrison, you sort o' spoke as if you knowed him?"

"Know him!" said Lynn, grinning. "Nora here used to be in his gang an'—"

"Put some hobbles on your tongue," she retorted. "When you try to be funny you 're sillier than usual, the which is difficult to be!"

The red-head had got up and sauntered to the bar, listening.

"Tell 'em, Nora. Tell 'bout you an' Buck," said Lynn. "She was on the train onct when—you tell 'em, Nora."

Nora told her story; part of it was thus:

"—the train stopped and the shootin' started. I woke up so hard I bumped my head. From the shootin' you 'd 've thought there was a hundred men around that train, an' from the yellin' in our car alone about two hundred scared women—me doin' the work of a dozen, I guess. Some of the men was so bad scairt they couldn't yell—they just gasped, dyin'-like.

"—made ever'body crawl outta their berths an' line up. There was some sights! Funny what folks wear to go to bed in! The woman cross from me forgot to put 'er teeth in, an' one old, fat boy tryin' to crawl under a lower got stuck. The racket it was like a Fourth o' July in a lunatic 'sylum.

"He come down the aisle, gun in each hand, wearin' a red handkerchief 'cross his face, an' a fellow behind carryin' a sack. Lord, I can see him now. I won't never forget just how he looked—a sort o' somethin' in the way he walked, easy, watchful, cool. Listen: He was no more flustered than Mack here dealin' for penny ante. 'Ever'thing but weddin' rings,' he says soft an' easy. I couldn't see, but I know just how he was smilin'!

"Ever'body that wasn't scairt dumb was beggin' of him not to shoot or sayin' they didn't have money 'r jewels. The toothless ol' girl, she gasped excited-like that she never owned no jewelry in her life, in the which case she had been a-wearin' somebody else's when she got on the train the night before, as I noticed envious an' particular. He searched her bunk an' she said he wasn't no gentleman a-tall to doubt a lady's word thataway.

" 'Madam,' he says, 'I don't—'an' pulls out a buckskin bag full of jewels. 'I am sure,' he says, 'as how some deceivin' person has tried to hide 'em unbeknownst to you in your bunk—so you don't need to feel bad, since I ain't takin' anything as b'longs to you'—an' he throws 'em into the gunny sack. If she'd had her teeth in I bet she 'd a-bit 'im!

"My turn next, an' I says right out:

" 'Lookyhere Mr. Man, I'm a hard workin' girl an' rustle for a livin'. I've got four hundred and fifty dollars there under my pillow an'—' He says:

" 'Lady, you just crawl right back into bed an' keep your hand on your money. I've got suspicions there's more thieves in this car than wear masks!'

"—My but didn't some o' the women hand it to me when he was gone! The old girl found her teeth an' she could yell lots louder with 'em in than out. She said she was goin' to tell the sheriff I was in cahoots with train robbers, an' it wasn't fair not to take my money too. 'Lady', I says, nice as pie, 'I'm sorry for you, 'cause if you 'd been young an' good looking too, you might 've had a softenin' effect.' Say, I'll bet they heard her yell clear over in the next county—"

"How much you reckon, figgerin' 'em all in," asked Red, "is the rewards f'r ol' Harrison by now?"

"He ain't *old!*" said Nora combatively.

"I seen a piece in the paper onct," said Lynn, "that Buck Harrison was an old man. But you, you 've jes' got a case on 'im. How you know he ain't old? Did he take off his handkerchief an' let yuh see his youthful featchers? Huhn?"

Nora disdained to answer, and young Red, apparently feeling that he was telling them something not already well known explained:

"They is father an' son, so folks say."

"You ever see either of 'em?" asked La Rue.

"Ain't hankerin' to, neither," said Red, shaking his head. "I ain't done much Sunday schoolin' in my time, an' I don't put myself on a pistol, or what you call them things a saint stands on—"

"Pulpit," Nora suggested.

"Ped'stal," said Lynn the scholarly.

"You called the turn," said Red, nodding. "Them as gits in pulpits ain't allus what they ort a-be," he explained to Nora. "Down where I come from, the sky-pilot bein' rheumatic one Sunday, a gambler he offered to speak. An' he spoke right well. He said gamblin' an' drinkin' an' such carryin's on was wrong, an' them as done it was shore goin' to ——. He said he didn't mind advisin' them as was present not to do them sort o' things 'cause they never done 'em nohow, but as he wouldn't want to speak up that away in the Red Eagle. It might hurt his bus'ness. Now me, I speak up anywhere an' say I ain't got no use for cow-thieves, sheep-herders n'r train robbers like them Harrisons!"

"I suppose—" Nora's tone was scornful—"for that reward you'd shoot a man like Buck Harrison?"

"I ain't never heard no reason why he ortn't a-be shot, but Miss, as lyin', even to a woman the which is beautiful as yoreself, ain't one o' things I do best—an' I'm a heap accomplished in some ways—I'll allow I'd shoot him if I got the chanct. But it 'd have to be a dang good un! Me, bein' obstrusously gentle an' calm-like, I ain't never harmed no honest folks needless. But I never see a wolf I don't shoot."

"You would ride out of your way," inquired La Rue, "to go up agin young Buck, f'r instance?"

"Mister, that remark is some peculiar. If I observes, 'Yes,' you-all will git opinionated as to my hankerin' f'r admiration as a trouble hunter, the which would wrong me grievous. I'm calm-like, I tell yuh. But I don't like varmints; hones' ones like snakes, or them as walks on two legs. Young Buck, they say, he kin shoot—an' me, I'm not suicidal. I kin shoot too some, but no better 'n an hones' man ort a-shoot. But what I allow is, my hand, as the Bible it says, is agin Buck Harrison, daddy an' son, an'—"

Nora interrupted:

"You 've talked so much you must be dry—we are anyhow, and it 's your turn now." She indicated the whisky bottle.

Red gazed at it with a meditative eye; it was unmistakably his turn, and he was broke. He could not back out and he would not explain. With a sudden flourish of hospitality he pushed the bottle toward Nora, then toward La Rue, invited Lynn and Mack, then helped himself.

"Here's how," said Nora. "I have to be getting into my work clothes."

"Ho wait, jus' a minute. Y' know, I c'n do a trick. I don't like to take no money offen friends an' such-like, but there ain't a heap o' folks as believes me when I maps the trick, an' usual they want a-bet."

He took the bottle and added a few drops to the liquor in the glass, bringing it to the brim.

"See, she's purt' near full. Now what you-all say—what 'll *you* say Mister Barkeep, if I says as how I can toss this here glass into the air an' catch this here likker in my mouth as she spills an' not miss a drop!"

"I'd say perform, an' I got money marbles or chalk agin yuh," Lynn answered.

"That 's jus' the way. Rash fellers as don't know me allus want to bet. It 'd be wrong o' me cause I know what I kin do an' what I can't. F'r one thing I can't beat him there—" indicating Mack— "playin' stud. But jus' to add to the amusement, I'll bet one o' these forty-five carterges agin one o' the lady's hairpins there that I can do aforesaid, to put it legal."

"Nora, give me a ha'rpin, all in a hurry," said Lynn holding out his hand as Red drew a shell from his belt and laid it gravely on the bar.

"Now ride yore hoss!" said Lynn, putting a hairpin beside the shell.

They watched closely. Red straightened out his arm, then stopped.

"But after you-all," he said with the bow of a host.

"Now," Lynn told him as the emptied glasses came back to the bar, "thumb yoreself."

Red picked up his glass, held it to his mouth, tipped back his head and drank, then replaced the glass on the bar.

"Danged if yuh didn't win my bet," he said, pushing the stakes toward the mystified Lynn.

"Your brain it needs a crutch to get around on, don't it?" Nora remarked puzzled.

"What the —— Say, lookee here, stranger," said Lynn, suddenly cool and lofty. "I begin to see a suspicion. You gotta pay more 'n this here carteridge for them drinks."

"The which," Red returned, "is imposterous!"

Lynn's hand came up from under the bar, and in his hand, muzzle on, a .45.

Red looked at the gun with a mild interest, and neither lifted his hands nor flinched.

"Speakin' perfessional," said Lynn, cool and full of wrath, "I'm goin' a-be paid f'r them drinks. I *kin* take a joke, but I ain't ready to take the jokin' an' joshin' of ever' man that 'll hear o' this an' come in offerin' me a .45 shell. Sooner 'r later, somebody they is goin' a-be hurt, bad; an' it 's only right an' proper you are him. It ain't offen as how in an emergency like this I talks so fluent, but none the less Mister, I'm goin' a-shoot if yuh don't pay. Moreover while I'm talkin' I might as well go on an' say as how you look to me like a four-flushin' dude, all togged in silk shirts an' things, yet tryin' to do the dodge on these here drinks. Do yuh pay, or do I plug yore hide?"

Red's face changed and became pale; his anger was up.

La Rue, watchful, saw that Red's muscles were tensed with the strain of a man who sets himself to jump—forward.

"I meant a joke 'cause I was cleaned at poker, but —— yore onery soul, if you want to shoot—"

La Rue stepped between them and spun a gold coin along the bar, saying—

"Take it out o' this."

Lynn glanced down at the coin and lowered the gun, putting it out of sight under the bar.

"I don't care who pays," he said a little apologetically, "but I don't get no name for bein' a barkeep as don't require no payment." Then, as he pushed back the change, he inquired of La Rue, "You an' him friends, or jes'—"

"Friends," said La Rue, pointedly.

Red stared wide-eyed, then nodded.

"Yeah, we shore are. Lest-wise I am from now on."

"My name—" this to Lynn—"it is La Rue. Larry La Rue."

"La Rue!" said Lynn.

"You are!" cried the dapper Mack. "Why didn't you say so! I'll go tell Jim you're here," and he hurried out.

"You don't look a bit like I pictured

him," said Nora, moving closer, giving La Rue a long searching look. She shook her head: "You ain't quite what Jim's expectin' neither for—"

"This here ain't no time for to talk," said Lynn, with some sharpness as he gave Nora a look of meaning, but at the same time he was scattering glasses along the bar, then with hospitable heartiness added, "It's drinkin' time, an' we'll all have one on the house. No hard feelin's there, Mr. Red. Step right up an'—"

Red turned away, took a step, paused, half turned again, and answering across his shoulder said:

"Lissen clost, feller, cause I don't like to have to repeat myself none, If you an' me was in —— an' you had a bottle o' ice water, I wouldn't drink with *you*. The which laud'ble sentyments I hereby make public an' if you disapproves, show yore symptoms—"

Nora frantically reached back-handedly across the bar, catching Lynn's arm as he reached down under the bar.

"None o' that, Lynn! You rubbed it in on the kid! Mack trimmed him—he didn't have no money—you ought 've took his joke—*Lynn!*"

Lynn's hands came into view, empty, but his face was set for a fight. He glanced sidewise at La Rue and La Rue eyed him.

"Mr. Red," said Nora quickly, "will you drink with *me?*"

Red's hat came off in an awkward bow.

"Miss I'm a heap honored, yuh bet!" But Red the untamable turned on Lynn and continued, "As f'r you, feller, if you 've got any suspicions as how yuh kin lay a gun on me, now or henceforth—jus' git demonstrative, jus' git demon—"

Nora pushed him aside, getting between him and the bar, saying:

"Shut up! Shut up, Red you little fool!"

Red shut up reluctantly, and for a moment across her shoulder glared at Lynn; then Nora pushed him farther away, turned to the bar, filled two glasses and carrying these, led the way far across the room to a remote table.

La Rue spoke mildly to Lynn, saying—

"My, but you-all 'round here are powerful ready to show yore guns to folks."

"Yeah, some," said Lynn crossly, again looking La Rue over carefully and not liking him very well. "Is this Red feller a friend o' yourn long?"

"Some. I'm allus friendly to his kind. Fightin' fools. Safer to be friendly. Don't yuh think so?"

"He looks a dude with all them fixin's."

"He's worse," said La Rue. "He's a —— fool. But the kind peac'ble men, like you an' me, had better let alone."

Lynn, not pleased, grunted vaguely.

Nora having got Red to a table well beyond hearing of the bar, was saying—

"You're a nice boy—" then with soothing frankness, reaching out, patting his hand—"but an awful fool."

"Miss, I shore allow yuh speak acc'rate. It's jus' a habit with me, bein' a fool."

"Lynn's all right too, but touchy, Kid."

"I reckon, if yuh say so. But he 'pears to have a powerful hankerin' to git hisself hurt. When a feller jerks his gun an' shoots, I'm not one to harbor no grievous feelin's, but when he uses the drop to talk insultin', I git so full o' pizon that like a teased rattler I c'd bite myself. An' this Mister La Rue you-all is so interested in—who's he? Yuh don't say? Goin' git a big ranch. Reckon I c'd go to ridin' f'r this Eighty-Eight? I took a heap o' likin' to him f'r the way he spoke up—I shore will lay to ask him f'r a job. As a cow hand there ain't many as is better 'n me."

" 'S that so?" asked Nora, half amused. "You don't hate yourself, do you?"

"Me, I don't tell no lies needless, never. I'm a good man in the saddle, an' I *do* think a heap o' myself. Red Clark of Tolluco—the which is me—has rights to speak up in comp'ny. I kin ride, rope an' shoot, I'm hones', an' no man what wants real bad to fin' me is lookin' f'r me."

"Well you *are* a funny kid!"

II

OLD HENDRYX, sitting with his back to the room, had slowly strummed the chords of the piano, pausing to listen with sad dreaminess at each thump. He often came into the saloon and sat at the piano, striking the keys like a piano tuner, listening. Everybody knew that he was queer.

Now he got up to leave. He was grayed, bowed, dim of eyes, but with the leanness of the frontiersman in his frame. His hands were nearly malformed into claws from years of holding reins when he had driven a six-horse stage over the winding grades of California. He passed along close to the bar and, as always when leaving, said:

"Thank ye, Lynn. Thank ye."

"Shore welcome. Come in any time, supper-time—the pianer she's yore's then. Say, now, Mr. Hendryx, you been 'round these here parts good many years. You happen for to remember Larry La Rue here ol' George's nephy—he rode in today—"

Then Lynn stopped, waiting.

Old Hendryx jerked himself up, then took a step forward, peering; he stopped again, and again stepped forward until he was almost against La Rue, and stood peering wrathfully. He half lifted his malformed hands as if to seize La Rue's throat, and his voice was low as if he could hardly speak at all.

"Ye've dared come back! Know me, y'hound? I'm Hendryx, ol' Dave Hendryx—her father! Aye ye're tremblin'—I can see ye're tremblin'! You thought I was dead I reckon, 'r ye wouldn't have come. I'm not dead though she is, my little girl ye killed! I ort to strangle ye—I ort—I—"

Old Hendryx backed away, sidled around La Rue, and as if partly drunk staggered to the door.

La Rue watched him, then looked quickly toward Lynn; but the bartender, chuckling secretly, was rearranging bottles on the shelf behind. He spoke without looking around as he busily shifted bottles:

"The ol' man he's clear crazy at times. 'Magines things. Flies off the handle. Harmless yuh know, but has spells that away. Yeah."

Jim Barley came in followed by Mack and the big Mexican Sheriff, Aquillar, who, naturally serious and staring, came at La Rue with a look as hard as if his intentions were not friendly. The big silver shield on his breast said "Sheriff."

La Rue turned sidewise, his hand falling lightly on his hip, and his glance toward the sheriff was unmistakably that of a man expecting trouble.

Aquillar frowned, paused, then came on.

Jim Barley was a fat cripple with a bald head; he wore a large black hat and carried a heavy stick. His nose was short but hooked. He wore thick gold rings and a heavy watch chain.

Barley shouted:

"Ho there, La Rue, my boy, how are yuh? Well, well, you got here to last, didn't yuh?"

He put out his hand, but La Rue pointedly hesitated, eying the sheriff. It was plain to all that La Rue felt that with his hand in Barley's grasp he would be at a disadvantage in case this strange sheriff had anything personal to say. The situation was embarrassing, but La Rue was not embarrassed, and he faced the sheriff expectantly.

Barley laughed loudly with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"La Rue, meet Sher'ff Aquillar—good friend o' mine—an' o' yores. Sher'ff, meet young La Rue."

Sheriff Aquillar, who was rather thickheaded anyhow, was puzzled, but put out his hand. La Rue shook it quickly, then, though with hardly an air of apology, explained:

"Me, I just had a mite o' trouble with a feller down the street a piece. Bein' a stranger, so to speak, Sheriff, I didn't know how good a friend that feller was of yores, or what kind of tale he might have tol' you. You shore looked business-like—"

"That's Aquillar's way," said Barley. "He allus looks official. Son, you say yuh had some trouble down the street—we didn't hear no shootin' in town tonight—Come on, boys, let's belly up an' be soc'able. You 're lookin' fine, Larry. Yeah."

Lynn presently got Barley off to one side on the pretext of giving him a message somebody had left, and not quite accurately related:

"Ol' Hendryx he was in here plunkin' the pianer, an' he reckernized him there right off an' give him a cussin' as to curl yore hair. He took it plenty silent an' plumb foolish— 'Peared ready to fight Aquillar? Jim, a lot o' folks 'pear ready to fight up to a certain point—then won't. Some dawgs as bristles their ha'r an' stiffens their legs, yuh couldn't kick 'em into a fight. As a bad man, Jim, that La Rue is only ha'r-branded, as yuh might 've knowed, knowin' who he is an' what he is," and Lynn nodded his head sagely.

III

BARLEY, wanting to have a private talk right off, took La Rue into a back room well toward the end of the building. It was a small room, musty, and everything in it was overlaid with dust.

In the fall, when Perez was like a boom town and herds of cattle trampled toward the shipping pens, and roistering cowboys—six months dry, as some of them said—crowded the bars, Barley got in many women; and then this small musty room was a woman's room. Tokens of the last to use it still remained. A broken curling-iron lay on the low pine dresser, with torn curl papers, hairpins, a discarded bow, all dust-covered. A photograph or two of men who looked as though picture-taking was a most solemn and slightly painful affair, remained stuck in the mirror. The fair one had been too indifferent to tear up the mementos for which she had probably begged and promised to cherish. The odor of a pungent perfume, spilled about the floor when the girl had besprinkled herself, remained like a stench. The room was just as it had been abandoned by the last occupant, and so it would remain until the next came and tidied up for her brief stay.

"We 've got to talk private," said Barley, closing the door and hobbling in after La Rue. "Nobody 'll bother us here. Set down."

La Rue put down the lamp Barley had given him to carry, and glanced about him; then gingerly pushing the broken curling-iron to one side, he half leaned, half sat on a corner of the dresser; and Barley, bearing heavily on his stout stick, eased himself into a chair and for some moments looked silently up at La Rue.

"That greaser, Hurtados, he was up here day 'r so ago, an' said you was comin'. Hurtados vamosed again. That little ol' Mexican was the only one as 'peared to know where yuh was all this time."

Barley paused and regarded La Rue again as if thinking of many things, and hardly knew of which to speak of first; then:

"Ten year, or thereabout. That is a long time, an' there ain't a heap o' folks around here as remembers yuh, personal. So yuh see why I spoke up when we met as if I knowed yuh personal. Git a peep at what I'm drivin' at?'

"Not in the least."

"Well, me bein' the administrator, yuh have to be identified official. So jus' to simplify things I'm pertendin' an how I've knowed yuh all along. There ain't nobody workin' for the Eighty-Eight as remembers yuh. I don't reckon as how yuh want to ask old Hendryx? Or Monk Cunnin'ham. Ol' Jake Spencer has allus spoke hard agin yuh. Off hand, I don't know who else there is around here as does 'member yuh personal. But the jedge bein' a friend o' mine, we do thing simple an' sudden, with not much formality-do-daddle in San Arnaz. So tomorrow I'll take yuh over an' interduce yuh an' start the rigermarole." Then pointedly, "What kind of a mess you been into lately, huhn?"

"How so? I ain't been havin' no unusual amount o' trouble as I know of."

"Well Cunnin'ham's a good friend o' mine, though I wouldn't trust him any further 'an I c'd throw a bull by the tail. Day or two ago he was to town an' I spoke to him about expectin' of yuh. He looked sort o' funny, like he had some aces up his sleeve, an' he says, 'Young La Rue may be sneakin' back around in this here part o' the country, but he won't never be claimin' the ranch. He 's wanted f'r murderin' a woman down in Texas'. "

La Rue looked interested, but all he said was:

"Am I, really?"

"Then yuh ain't!"

"I don't keep much track o' the women, Mexicans, an' children I've killed. A feller's gotta have some targets y'know."

Barley grunted, not pleased:

"Don't try to be smart. This here is bus'ness. There's some other heirs too, y'know—don't yuh?"

"I'm listenin', clost."

"Somehow yuh don't seem much like folks 'spected yuh to be," said Barley doubtfully, looking him over again. "But yuh 'peared to look natural to ol' Hendryx anyhow. Heh?"

"You're doin' the talkin'."

"Hendryx's girl she had a baby an' both of 'em died. I reckon he was surprized to see yuh. Yore cousin an' her maw is out to the ranch. They don't think much o' you, them women."

"Go ahead. Say yore say."

"Them women an' yuh never knowed each other, but they know all about you. Ol' George he wrote 'em. I read some of 'em. The women they was travelin' west when ol' George he was killed." Barley paused and frowned, regarding La Rue with the expression of one who has unpleasant news, then asked, "You ain't much up on law, are yuh?"

"Not a heap, no."

"Law it's cur'ous," said Barley, nodding gravely with the assurance of an accomplished liar. "Yore cousin an' her mother is goin' to try to beat yuh out of ever'thing. An' they may do it—but for me."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. You bein' the son, you git the big share, natural. But cousins they has some rights, too." Barley shook his head regretfully. "An she's shore got some letters from ol' George showin' he never meant you to have none o' the ranch."

"That's liable to be bad, huhn?"

"Yeah. An' there's got to be a complete understandin' between us, young feller!"

Barley looked at him aggressively, and waited for a reply.

La Rue took a sack of tobacco and papers from his shirt pocket, and keeping his eyes level with Barley's, deftly rolled a cigaret, and answered—

"I'm a-listenin'."

"Yore father he left a will."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Yore cousin, she knows there is a will." Barley paused, waiting for some remark.

La Rue said nothing.

"There is a will, an' I've got it, young feller. Legal, you don't git so much as the hair off one cow."

La Rue scratched a match against the drawer, lighted the cigaret, inhaled deeply, shook out the match, tossed it aside, following the fall of the match with his glance; then:

"All right. The jig it is up, I reckon. I knowed if there was a will I was out."

"No—" Barley grinned and toyed with his heavy watch chain—"no you ain't. I'm yore friend. The will it ain't been found—yit. Nobody knows where it is, but me—an' I got 'er safe. See?"

La Rue nodded.

"I'm thinkin' some o' tearin' it up, that will, an' sayin' nothin' to nobody. Now if yuh want me to do that, yuh jus' give me an' undated bill o' sale to the ranch."

La Rue, grinning faintly, shook his head.

"You will—or git nothin'," said Barley firmly, showing anger.

"Do I," La Rue inquired, "look like a man that plumb neglects to get his share when there is some stealin' bein' done? Do I?"

"Of course you'll git a share. I'll give yuh ten thousand after the court affirms you the heir, legal."

"Generous," said La Rue.

"Then you git nothin'!"

"Suits me," said La Rue. He dropped his cigaret, stood up, then after watching Barley a moment moved toward the door, saying, "Good bye I reckon."

Barley struck the floor rapidly with his cane, shouting:

"Yore a fool. I'll git the ranch anyhow. Yore cousin is goin' have to sell out an'—"

"For ten thousand?"

"Won't be much more."

"As a cow thief," said La Rue, "you are the best I've ever knowed. Cows, hosses, land, water, buildin's, you take 'em all."

"I'll jus' produce the will showin' you 've been cut off, then she'll git it all, an' I git it from her. Ol' George wrote her he'd made a will leavin' ever'thing to her. But the will it ain't been found yet. That is," Barley added quickly, "by nobody but me."

"I bet yuh could steal the pants off Buck Harrison hisself," said La Rue, speculatively.

"Look here, young feller, don't be insultin'! I'm—"

"I," La Rue answered mildly, "am complimentin' yuh."

"I'm not the sort of man as takes sneerin' remarks friendly. If you don't know 'bout me you 'd better inquire around as to who Jim Barley is in this man's country. An' I'm doin' of you a favor! That there 's gratytude! But I don't like them women, so I'll fix you all up to git the ranch, with the understandin' that you shore do as I say. Is that a go?"

"What you say is interestin'."

"Now," said Barley as if the matter was settled, "the foreman o' yore ranch is in town today. He's one o' the best cowmen an' worst gunmen in this here San Arnaz country, an' till the estate it is all settled we'll let him continue for to run things in his own way out there."

"Oh, you mean Saunders? Too bad, but he's quit. He's not workin' for the Eighty-Eight no more."

"Say, you don't 'pear to be real drunk—" Barley was not joking, he was seriously mystified—"but you 've been actin' locoqueer tonight. Aquillar he came near shootin' you, jus' on suspicion. An' Saunders he's runnin' the Eighty-Eight. What's the matter with yuh, anyhow?"

"No, Saunders he's quit. He was over the Santa Fé saloon as I rode in. I stopped by an' had a talk with him. He's not workin' for the Eighty-Eight now."

"Well he is! He can't quit! I wouldn't 'low him to even if he tried, an' he ain't wantin' to try. Saunders he's carryin' out some plans for me. How'd you come to know him? How'd he come to tell you he was quit."

"I fired him," said La Rue.

"*You*—you *what?*"

"I didn't much like his looks, so I got behind his chair, put a gun to his ear, an' fired him quick."

"You," said Barley without anger, "are a liar. If you looked like you wanted to pull a gun on Slab the carpenter he would begin workin' on yore burial clothes. What makes you talk thataway?"

"Well till after you record that bill o' sale I ain't give you yet, Saunders ain't goin' be workin' for the Eighty-Eight. That goes. I fired him. He stays fired."

"Well, he don't! You never fired him nohow. You ain't got the right. I'm 'ministrator. I'm runnin' that ranch. You couldn't fire Slab. He wouldn't stand for it. How 'd you come to say yuh did? I don't understan' you, quite."

"He pulled on a kid in a poker game. Right there I cut his trail. He's fired. Go ask him."

"Slab Saunders?"

"Leastwise he said that was his name."

"Yuh 've shore played —— if you 've done that. Maybe as how you've made Slab so peevish I can't git him to stay on."

"Shouldn't wonder," said La Rue.

"Huhn?"

"I don't think he'll stay on. It ain't a habit men have after I fire 'em."

"You talk like you'd handled some men in yore time?"

"Some."

"Looky here," said Barley, being emphatic, "you are goin' spoil things, you keep on meddlin'. I'll have a talk with Slab an' you an' him patch it up because—"

"Take a mighty good doctor to patch him up if he don't stay fired."

"—because Slab an' me has got a plan that is workin' out an'—"

"What sort of plan?" asked La Rue.

"Has to do with them women an'—"

"My cousin, is she purtty?"

"No, she ain't. An' wouldn't do you no good if she was. She's skinny as a snake an' hates you like poison. Slab he's got 'er purtty well tamed—"

"I see," said La Rue. "After Slab marries her you 'll produce the will showing the ranch is hers; if he don't marry her, I get the ranch. He's fired."

"If that's what's troublin' of you," said Barley tolerantly, "I can say that Slab, bein' handicapped some natural by them looks o' his, ain't playin' no love part. No. He 's sorta been impressin' on them women in ways var'ous an' sundry that a cow ranch ain't quiet an' none agreeable for ladies, jus' so they'd be willin' to sell out their share cheap, understan'?"

La Rue nodded, much enlightened; he said—

"Well, not to brag, but I reckon I've scared as many women an' children as this Slab feller, though as you say, he's got me handicapped by them looks o' his—"

Barley snorted angrily.

"You try to be funny without knowin' how! Now if I must repeat myself some more, I'll say onct agin' an final, Slab Saunders is foreman o' the Eighty-Eight while I'm administrator. All I got to do to settle yore hash is to produce that will, the which I've shore got. Now you go over to the hotel an' eat, then come back. I'll have somethin' more to say. I'm goin' to get hold of Slab an' have a talk."

IV

LA RUE returned to the barroom.

Some of the townspeople who nightly loafed there, had begun to drop in and were strung along the bar, and were much interested in the news of La Rue's return. Adams, the editor, was there, and his first-hand account of what had happened in Pop Murdock's place did not increase respect among the listeners for La Rue.

Nora, now in her work clothes as she called the short black velvet dress, sewn with silver tinsel and spotted with red rosettes, was at the faro table. Two other "regular girls," still looking sleepy-eyed, half heartedly lounged at men's elbows.

As La Rue came in through the rear, Lynn said:

"That's him there now—in back," and the line at the bar turned with one movement to look. La Rue glanced quickly, suspiciously, along the row of faces, and would have passed on through the barroom, but young Red got up from the table where he had been waiting, and with peg-like tramp of dime-heeled boots and rattling clatter of spurs, came at La Rue.

Red said:

"Can you pause an' listen to a yell o' wo? I'm a heap grateful for the way you spoke up when that wall-eyed barkeep tried to copper my joke. An' I'm wonderin', do yuh need a top hand out to yore ranch?"

"Might be. Come on an' we'll have supper together anyhow."

They entered the dining-room of the hotel. It was a long narrow dim room, with two kerosene lamps, turned low, burning in brackets on the wall. The supper hour was past; the tables had been swept clear of dishes, excepting the salt and pepper shakers, sugar bowl, vinegar bottle, which were huddled into the center of each table. A rattle and clatter of dishes, as if they were being thrown about by a shovel, could be heard from the kitchen.

"I guess we've drawed a blank," said Red, looking at the empty tables. "An' I've been tellin' my stomick we'd eat hearty. It 'll think I'm an awful liar."

Then noticing two figures vaguely outlined in the shadows, Red approached; and as he came near they stirred alertly, and he saw that one was a woman. He had the impression that she was a pretty woman, though the light was dim. It was quite as if these two had selected the darkest position in the dining-room. They eyed him closely and the man faced about, ready to rise; and it seemed to Red that the man was suspiciously on guard.

"Pardon me, folks, but is there any chanct to eat, yuh reckon?"

"The dining-room," said the man unfriendily, "is closed."

The woman spoke up:

"The boys are hungry, Cliff;" then to Red, "Step back there to the kitchen and ask the cook. Maybe he'll give you something."

Red went to the kitchen, poked his head through the swinging door, and said:

"Howdy folks. I know we ort to be made to starve f'r not gittin' here on time. But kin me an' my friend out here have a little snack? It's impositionin' I know, but hungry men they ain't got no manners."

The waitress, who was also dishwasher, a tall bony woman with a thin strained face, groaned:

"Oh laws! Ain't a body ever goin' git no rest! You men! Billy, shall we feed 'em or let 'em starve?"

And as she spoke she had begun reaching for plates and cutlery.

"You," said Billy the cook, grouchily, after the manner of cooks, "would feed a hoss-thief after midnight."

"If you was town folks," said the waitress sternly to Red, "you'd be out o' luck—but strangers ain't no way o' knowin' that in this here hotel we never serve no meals after hours to nobody."

She entered the room with a rush, turned up a lamp, and with a scurrying bustle set places at the table nearest the kitchen then brought baked beans, bread, coffee, stewed prunes.

As she shuffled the dishes about the table she bent forward and in a quick low voice, jerking her head by way of gesture, said:

"See them two? That's Lola Spencer an' Cliff Hammarsmith. Some day ol' Jake's goin' find out about his wife's carryin' on—then—" by way of emphasis she slammed a cup down hard, and La Rue, who was looking into the shadows where the man and woman sat, saw him start nervously at the sound.

"It ain't right, such goin's on," said the lank waitress. "I shore wouldn't do it, not even for him, an' laws, but he's good lookin'!"

When Red had lined himself well with pork and beans, he, being talkative by nature, talked; and La Rue listened:

"Me, I'm lookin' for work. 'Tain't offen I've got such overpowerin' hankerin' for a job, but I got two conterdictory weaknesses, the which is eatin' an' poker. After I play poker I've got to work for to eat.

"I'm a stranger to these here parts, but to home wherever I set down. I try my durndest to keep outa trouble, but I'm luckless that way, seems like. Only recent me an' a feller had an argyment, an' the cor'ner, bein' his friend, said I was in the wrong, the which mebbe was so, since this other feller was such a pore hand with a gun that he barked at me twict afore I sorta woke up to his unfriendly attytude.

"Yeah. It's a fac'. He didn't like my silk shirt none. She was a purple an' red un—purttier 'an this here yaller un. He'd bet some fellers he could make me take 'er off an' give 'er to him for a nose-wipe. Yeah. Me, bein' absorbed by a purtty girl, I don't hear him speak, so he up an' shoots. Me, bein' a stranger in this here town an' not havin' quarreled with nobody, I don't figger it's me that's bein' addressed, so I jus' looks around spectator-like. An' him, bein' a pore hand with a gun, his next shot it cuts the heel offen my boot, the which I resent *pronto*.

"This bein' one o' them civilized places, an bad as most, they keeps a cor'ner; an' me, all innercent as a babe, attends the inquest, cur'ous. Yeah. An' me—they ask me outa respect to the dead to lay aside my gun while the cor'ner is investigatin' of the suicide. Me, I'm expectin' at least a vote o' thanks at the bar, an' instead I git pernounced guilty of killin' a respect-'ble citizen what wanted to make a nose-wipe outa my twelve-dollar shirt—the which, says the cor'ner, deliverin' of his verdict, was a laudable ambition. Yeah.

"What 'd I do? What 'd you a-done? What 'd any innercent man do? I done jus' that! They was two lamps set on the table an' the remains he was on the floor. I jus' naturally give that table a kick, then I went headfirst outa the winder. I hit my saddle an' I was on my way. Over my shoulder when I'm some piece from town I can see flames, an' the persuers must a-been busy fightin' fire, cause except for some shootin' that's pore as you'd expect in a town like that, I'm not troubled none leavin'.

"I wear purtty shirts because I like 'em. I buy 'em with my own brow-sweat, an' I take it a heap personal to have my shirts disliked over-much."

"An' you want a job now?"

"Yeah."

"Yo're hired."

"Without meanin' to brag none, you'll find me a good cowhand," said Red. "An' if you 'll advance me a little—what's top-hand wages in this man's country, anyhow?"

"What's been yore best pay?"

"I touched sixty onct, bustin' broncs."

"I'll pay it," said La Rue.

"Yo're generous. I probably ain't worth it. The feller what paid me said sum before belly-ached powerful, but he was such an onery cuss nobody much 'd ride for him, an' he had to have some broncs busticated in a hurry. Yuh see, Mister La Rue, I *kin* ride. I may not be the best rider in the whole world, but it 'd be a toss-up 'tween me an' him. Times I been throwed so danged far I had to make camp a couple o' nights on my way back to the ranch house, but tain't offen. Naw, f'r I *am* a good rider though I've seen hosses as purt-near took all my self-respect.

"Now 'll yuh advance me a couple weeks' wages—I'll pay for this here supper then lead yuh to the bar. I ain't much of a hand to drink, but I shore do like to celybrate."

In leaving the dining-room they passed near the shadowed table where Cliff Hammarsmith and Lola Spencer sat, and dim as it was, La Rue could tell, though she turned her face, that the woman was in tears.

V

ONLY two or three men were at the hotel bar, but they talked freely, with excitement, because Slab Saunders and his friend Smoky Pete had left but a very little while before. Saunders had told his story, repeating it drunkenly, mixing it with threats, and after many false starts had at last gone on his way, avowedly to find and shoot Larry La Rue.

Red listened to the jerky talk of the men at the bar, then turned to La Rue, asking in a mystified low tone:

"So that feller Saunders I overheard 'em speakin' about in the I. X. L. is lookin' for yuh, huhn?"

"I reckon."

"An' he's been steppin' in the tanglefoot, 'cording to these here gentlemen. See, these gents now are moseyin' along as if they thought mebbe they was goin' to see the circus."

The men had taken a final drink and, curious to see what would happen when Saunders met his man, gone out.

The bartender now returned to his remaining customers, made a few swipes with his bar towel, put his elbows on the spot he had cleaned, and leaned forward, saying sociably—

"May be a little excitement hereabouts afore mornin'."

"Yeah?" Red inquired.

"Yeah," the bartender repeated. "Slab Saunders he's got on his war paint."

"Got it inside o' him, yuh mean," Red suggested.

"Mebbe," said the bartender, looking critical.

"Who's this Slab person," Red asked.

"Him? He's sort uv assistant to the undertaker in these here parts, an' foreman o' the La Rue Eighty-Eight. Yuh know about La Rue, don't yuh?"

"We," said the deceitful Red-head, "are strangers some."

"Well, young La Rue, he was run outa these here parts some years back, bein' a no 'count feller, but now he's back to git his paw's ranch. An' bein' jus' as onery an' underhanded as a sandburr in a blanket, he opines to get hisself a gun name firs' jump among folks here. So while Slab he's settin' in a poker game down the street a piece, this La Rue he sneaks up behind Slab's chair, pokes a gun agin Slab's year, an' takes Slab's gun offen him. After the which, said polecat runs back'ards out the front door an' goes into hidin'. Slab he's huntin' high an' low, but the polecat is holed up some'ers."

Red, looking expectantly at La Rue, edged off sidewise; the bartender caught the significance of the move and looked startled, and said to La Rue, slowly, anxiously:

"You—*him?*"

La Rue nodded.

"I only said what Slab he was sayin'," the bartender began hastily. Then to show where his heart lay, said, "Here, have another drink, you fellers. Slab an' Pete they was shootin' off their mouths—here, have a drink."

La Rue grinned without anger and without friendliness, and keeping his eyes steadily on the fellow, said:

"Red, how was it you expressed yoreself to Barley's bartender this evenin'? I'd like for this one to hear."

"Feller," said Red, "listen clost. If us three was in —— on a perticular hot day, an' you had a bottle o' ice water—we wouldn't drink with you. We 'd just natural take it away from yuh an' drink it ourselfs."

Thereupon La Rue and Red walked from the room, and the bartender with a hand somewhat unsteady helped himself to the bottle of whisky.

TO BE CONTINUED

INDIAN MOURNING

By Faunce Rochester

IN HIS exhaustive study of the mortuary customs of the North American Indians, Dr. H. C. Yarrow comments on the absence of true aquatic burial as a "confirmed rite or ceremony"—First Annual report of the Bureau of Ethnology. And yet this form of burial was used extensively on one occasion at Yaquina Bay, with none other than Phil Sheridan, then a young lieutenant, being the undertaker. In the summer of 1856 he was sent from Fort Haskins to the bay to rescue an Indian agent from a log hut, where he had been besieged by starving Coquille. He was to succor the Indians as well as the agent and restore peace. The Indians were fish-eaters, "salt chuck" in the Chinook jargon, and very desperate because of hunger.

Not wishing to leave a large force there to keep them quiet, Lieut. Sheridan set about finding a suitable location for a blockhouse, which would provide a small force with adequate protection. The only level spot he could find was the burying ground of the tribe. The dead were buried in canoes, which were supported a few feet from the ground by forked sticks. There were some fifty of these canoes and all in a fair state of preservation. Each of the dead had all his worldly effects buried in the canoe with him.

As there is nothing more painful to an American aborigine than to disturb the resting place of his dead, it required much tact and persuasion to induce the Indians to give the required permission. Finally it was agreed that at noon on a certain day, when the tide was going out, the half hundred canoes with their occupants should be placed in the bay, to float with the tide into the ocean and across it to the happy hunting grounds.

Possibly no other such argosy ever set sail from a North American coast. On the hour, with the tide ebbing fast, the canoes were deposited in the water. From the hills the Indians beheld their dead sail away into the sea and, presumably, on and on to the strand of the Indian's heaven.

WHEN the government sent troops into Oregon Territory to control the Indians the Rogue River band was the last to surrender. After they came under the influence of the troops the military leaders found it more difficult to wean them away from certain customs than it had been to drive them from the war-path. One custom of mourning was to crop the hair as closely as possible and to cover the head with a hood of plaster, made out of clay, pulverized charcoal and pitch from the pine tree. This hood measured an inch in thickness and was to be worn until the growth of the hair literally lifted it from the head. Before this relief could come the plaster became solid and almost as hard as stone. It was with the utmost difficulty that the Indians were persuaded to abandon this practise.

Another great obstacle to their advancement was their firm belief in their medicine-doctors. They believed these humbugs could kill or cure at will. Yet the fakirs did not have it all their own way and might be considered to show sportsmanship, inasmuch as the family would endeavor to take a doctor's life if the patient died. It resulted that every time a man was mortally ill, and the red medicine strings tied around his joints failed to keep the evil spirits away, the doctor, having prior knowledge of death's approach, made it a race to the nearest military post. From this sanctuary he would wait till time had somewhat dulled the mourners' grief. He would then negotiate a settlement which would permit him to return and attend to his practise. A Rogue River woman, thus employed, was accused of "willing" a man to die. She was pursued just inside the limits of the garrison and was shot to death in sight of the officers' quarters. The post-surgeon found sixteen gunshot wounds on the body.

MUD

A Complete Novelette

by

J. D. Newsom

Author of "The Jade Ax," "In the Rain," etc.

BY THE light of a candle, stuck on a box close to his elbow, Withers wrote laboriously. About him in the shadows men snored and groaned in their sleep, and a trickle of mud crept down the stairs and sizzled as it lapped about the faintly glowing charcoal brazier. The place was full of steam and coal-gas and the exhalations of twenty men, so that the candle burned low and threatened to go out, but Withers wrote on, bending down over his pad of paper until the brim of his vizor almost touched the end of his pencil.

Bending over required a tremendous effort, for beneath his tunic he wore three sweaters and his neck and ears were covered with many mufflers. Mittens were on his red hands, and about his shoulders hung a blanket much the worse for wear. Out of this mass of clothing stuck his face, ivory-white, dirty and bearded, with an upturned nose and round, rather bulging eyes. He blinked as he wrote and grimaced frightfully, as if the creation of each word were a physical effort.

At last, however, the letter reached an end and he signed it twice, once with the wavering scrawl which was his signature, and once in block letters, gouged out of the paper with a moistened pencil point. Then he scooped mud off the floor with his thumb and smeared it over the clean page, taking care not to efface any of the words.

He straightened up, wheezing, and at arm's length admired his handiwork with unspeakable pride. He started to fold the letter, thought better of it, leaned over and shook a sleeping man by the shoulder; shook him violently.

"For ——'s sake!" grunted the man, only half awake, sitting bolt upright and groping along the floor for his equipment. "We got to turn out, have we?"

"'Ere," said Withers in a throaty whisper, "I say, matey, you want to 'ear this. It's prime."

The man stared at Withers, stupid with sleep and disgust.

"You mean," he demanded wrathfully, "you mean you woke me up to listen to your —— love letters *again?* Why pick on me? Use your nut, boy, I crave sleep."

"But listen, Curialo," Withers protested, "you ought to be interested, go' blimey! It's to this 'ere American lidy."

"Outside!" jeered Curialo. "We took over this sector at one o'clock this morning. I been on my feet twenty-five hours solid, and I don't give a curse for anybody. Let me rest or I'll drown you."

"Now I say, I say now, matey, 'ave a 'eart! This 'ere's the skirt what sent us all the mufflers and socks along wiv that card wishing us a Christmas joy. You ain't forgotten yet, 'ave you?"

"Forget that jane? It can't be done. Those socks wouldn't fit a kid of two." He yawned. "Her heart went out to us, didn't it? Oh, well, I'm going—"

"Wait arf a mo', cawn't you? Now listen, matey, listen!" he begged as Curialo raised a large and muddy fist. "Listen:

She might send us a bit of a postal horder next time if we 'andle this right."

Curialo's fist unclenched. Thoughtfully he scratched the back of his neck.

"Go on," he said at last, "only make it snappy."

"'Ere goes," sighed Withers, looking tenderly at his handiwork. "Just you tell me if this ain't prime:

> DEAR MRS. LANDERER:
>
> We ave received your pkg and it will astonish you to receive an answer writ in English, for it was addressed to the French army but it reached the Foreign Legion and was thankfully received, that is we found the pkg on the tailboard of a camion which was standing by the side of a road in a ditch near Vaudrecourt and the driver was not sober. Me and my mate what is American like your good self we took the pkg as it was addressed to the soldiers of France which we are even if the driver looked at us as kence.

"What's 'at?" inquired Curialo.

"Sidewise-like and dirty," explained Withers.

> You must know the Foreign Legion never gets no pkgs for we are treated harsh and are supposed to be woolfs in sheeps clothing and are expected to fight all the time and have no money. So I am taking the liberty of asking you to remember us in particular in the future and not address remittances direct to the whole French army. It is too chancy.
>
> As I write shells is bursting around us and the grons of the dying fill the air for fair.

"Better cross that out," suggested Curialo. "She may think we're dead by the time she gets the letter. Make it more hopeful."

"I 'ave," Withers assured him.

> But we are old soldiers and ave hopes of being in the gt. march through Berlin but that won't come for some time yet. The battle is not getting worse and we will attack with the bayonet soon. So you see we are doing our bit and would it be asking too much of you to send us direct a small remittance which will help us bear our burden like men and soldiers?
>
> I would say that Curialo was once connected with the New York ice cream business and was most respectable and I was once a member of the King's Royal Rifles, may God bless him, deserting by mistake along of a broken heart and joining the Legion in the hopes of a speedy and honorable death.

"There you go again," grunted Curialo. "You ain't a good risk."

"I got to tell 'er somethink, ain't I?" protested Withers. "Got to mike 'er think we're a bit dahn at the math. 'Ere's the end:

> But I hope to live long enough to have the pleasure of hearing from your good self again and being in the gt. march upon Berlin.
>
> Hoping this finds you as it leaves me in the pink of condition though amidst shot and shell, I am yr. hopeful svt. Albert Withers.

"There's a p. s.," he concluded. "It says:

> French soldiers all ave war godmothers to look after them, but nobody here looks after us in a proper manner for are we not the Legion of the Lost as the poet says? Would you wish to adopt two lonely soldiers of good birth and moral cracter for the duration? We will write regular. Yours for a gt. victory.

"That ought to fetch 'er," he declared with pride.

"It ought to," agreed Curialo, "but it won't. You laid it on too thick. What's the use telling the world about how we came to get that bundle of junk?"

"Well, I could add a bit, saying—"

A man over in a corner sat up suddenly, his face popping out of the shadows into the candlelight as if he were on springs.

"Oh, ——!" he cried. "Species of camels, species of pig-heads, but let us sleep then! If you can not let other men repose tranquilly, then go and gabble outside. Ah, but I have had enough of this—it is a scandal, a crime against nature to be awake at this hour!"

"All right, all right," Curialo said to him. Then turning to Withers:

"Can that stuff for tonight, buddy. Got to get some sleep."

So HEAVY feet came slumping and sloshing down the steps. A head appeared level with the ceiling. It was the bearded, solemn face of Verbuken, the platoon sergeant.

"Withers and Curialo here?" he brayed.

Howls answered him. Boots, cans and trenching tools hurled by unseen hands clattered against the woodwork at the foot of the stairs.

"Silence!" he ordered. "It is I who commands silence! I, the Sergeant Verbuken!"

There was a very great silence.

"Withers and Curialo," he went on. "Outside at once!"

They followed him, struggling into the wet harness of their knapsacks and stumbling clumsily over outstretched legs. They emerged into a trench, knee-deep in mud, a foul black place, barely shoulder-high, where the wind cut like a knife through wet clothing.

"You two," said the sergeant, "have been reported again. I am tired of your filthy habits. As soon as we leave these trenches, you go up before the captain."

"What's the trouble this time, Sergeant?" inquired Curialo.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," sneered Verbuken. "Less than nothing, if that is possible. You are only charged with having robbed a motor truck stranded near Vaudrecourt. The driver—"

"Listen, Sergeant," pleaded Withers. "Listen: That driver was drunk, and he was going to throw away everything he had. Now, he threw a parcel at us—we were standing by that estaminet where that girl with the broken teeth was—and we kept it because it wasn't addressed to anybody in particular, only to the—"

"You confess," snapped Verbuken. "That is well. But it is fantastic your audacity—fantastic!"

Farther down the line a shell whined through the air and exploded with a red lick of flame and a roar.

"And who received the goods?"

"I did," explained Withers, "full in the chest. If I hadn't been standing there the package would have gone through the window of the estaminet. I said—"

Another shell burst with a shattering *crump!* and the sergeant, staring off to the left, remarked professionally:

"That is falling close to the canal. One can tell by the sound."

As he had not seen those trenches in daylight and only knew of the canal by hearsay his guess was a very rough one.

"Very good," he went on, reverting to more important matters. "So the theft is admitted by Withers; the goods being shared with Curialo. The guilt is established. When we are relieved you will be dealt with strictly according to regulations. In the meantime you will do extra duty. Follow me!"

He led them around slippery corners and through quagmires to a hole in the side of the trench where there were coils of wire, pickets and mallets, rockets and rusty bombs and rifle grenades, all dumped there together to be sorted out the coming morning by the light of day.

"Now," he said with evident pleasure, "you will go out and mend the wire with great care. It is quite thin, for those ——'s of the Hundred and Twenty-Ninth were a useless lot. I will tell you when you may come in."

"But we don't know the lay of this sector," complained Withers. "We don't know where to start—"

"Start anywhere," snapped Verbuken, "and remember that though this is a quiet sector the boche has listening posts close to our line. If you work discreetly you will not be annoyed. Over you go!"

It was black and windy out in the open, and the ground was littered with rubbish which clanged and rattled at a touch. The belt of wire was thin, a few drooping strands sagging between broken pickets, and in places there was no wire at all.

The German guns were still worrying the same spot down by the canal, and a watchful sentry some distance away fired single rounds into the darkness once every five minutes. The night was quiet.

For a time Curialo and Withers worked in silence, hammering in pickets with muffled mallets, until they heard the sergeant flounder away. By common consent they stopped work and took shelter in a shell hole half filled with slime.

"It ain't right," protested Withers. "We ain't done nothink. That driver—even if I did bat 'im one over the ear, what right 'ad 'e, I'd like to know, to report us?"

"Yea!" snorted Curialo, "but why didn't you deny the whole thing? It's always safer."

"But we didn't steal nothink! 'E started it, didn't 'e? Didn't 'e 'it you wiv a wrench? Didn't I try to stop 'im? Didn't 'e fair 'eave that —— parcel at me. Go' blimey, might think we was blarsted robbers. Yus—robbers! I tell you I'm sick of being made the goat whenever this 'ere sergeant is feeling liverish. 'E's been picking on me for a matter of four years, peace and war."

"Forget him. He's going to stop a bullet pretty soon if he don't reform. You're not alone."

"But I cawn't forgit 'im," protested Withers. "Bit of a rotter, 'e is. 'E ain't 'uman. You watch; it won't be 'is blinking fault if we don't both lose a month's pay and go to jail. It's the blooming disgrice o' being bullied by a man like that, what I objects to. Wouldn't be so bad if 'e wasn't a —— foreigner. Lumme! how I wisht I was back with the K. R. R.s, wiv men what speaks king's Henglish instead of this 'ere

Flemish which sounds worse'n German! I got arf a mind—"

"Can it," Curialo whispered sharply.

HE STARED out into the darkness, raising his chin level with the lip of the crater. The shelling down by the canal had stopped; even the sentry was no longer firing once every five minutes, and there were no flares, so that the shank of a night was black and utterly quiet save for the dismal wail of the wind through the wire and an odd, uncomfortable ghost of a sound, not unlike the slithering sound made by a man creeping along through the mud. Then some tin cans rattled and something fell with a soft *plop!* into water.

"Go' blimey," breathed Withers. "Go' blimey. Patrol, eh what?"

Curialo made no answer. He was peering at the outer row of pickets where he had seen a bulky black shape loom up against the gray of the clouds. Unmistakably it was a man, and that man had no business out there if he wanted to live.

"Bit of a boche patrol taking a *dekko* at the wire," Withers went on. "That's why they ain't putting up no flares."

"I can only spot one of 'em," whispered Curialo. "He—let's get him."

The man was coming in closer. Having crawled under the first barrier he was feeling his way along on hands and knees through the trip wire and the litter of rubbish and the shell holes.

"It might square things with the sawgint," agreed Withers, his teeth beginning to chatter.

"Shut up! He's dead ahead. You go 'round to the right. Cut him off."

They left the shell hole, flat to the ground on their bellies, and the mud oozed in between the buttons of their tunics and soaked through their clothing.

An inch at a time Withers wormed his way along. When he came within a dozen feet of the prowler, he became so engrossed in his task that he forgot his surroundings. The immediate result was that a spike on a swaying strand of wire caught at his ear. He tried to move his head away from the painful obstruction and only succeeded in driving the spike more firmly into the cartilage. He stopped dead and after a second of panic, cautiously tried to free himself. But his fingers were thick with mud and clumsy, while the spike seemed to have been fashioned on the principle of a fish-hook. Each time he tried to loosen its hold it gouged a slightly larger wound in his ear, and his cheek was wet with blood, which mingled with the dirt on his face and ran stickily down inside his collar.

Bracing himself on his knees and his left hand, he fumbled about, trying to lift his ear off the spike, trying to lift the spike out of his ear, and all the time the man was coming closer, very cautiously and very deliberately. Withers tried to work faster, for the pain was acute and his position far from comfortable. Then his sleeve caught on the barbs and he hung there dejectedly by his ear and his arm, not quite sure what he ought to do next.

The German was within arm's length, wallowing in the muck on the other side of a shell hole and breathing hard through his nose. He seemed doubtful as to what course to pursue. For a matter of seconds he lay close to the ground, then he heaved himself to his knees, towering up through the darkness. The whitish blob which was his face appeared and disappeared as he turned his head from right to left and back again. Withers could hear him snuffling thoughtfully.

The cockney, aware of his own loud breathing, tried to hold it in check until he began to choke. He gurgled and looked up almost furtively over his shoulder. The German was facing toward him. He hunched his shoulders up around his neck and waited for the inevitable doom. Then Curialo struck that German from behind and they both went down into the mire of the shell hole with a sloppy splash.

Withers' relief was short-lived. At the sound of the fall a machine-gun across the way opened fire, its bullets whistling by level with the picket tops and clacking viciously into the sandbags on the parapet. He tried to lower his head closer to the ground, and his knees and one free hand, insecurely braced in the mud, slipped from beneath him. He collapsed on his face, so that the spike tore clear of his ear, and he was free.

He forgot the burning pain and hurled himself into the shell hole, where a squirming fight was in progress in two feet of mud.

"I got him," grunted Curialo, "but I can't hold the ——. He's too slippery. Hit him with something."

He lay across the German's back, holding the man face downward by the hair. But the latter was still full of fight for he heaved and made terrible sounds whenever he managed to get his mouth out of the mud, and his boots threshed madly about.

The machine-gun was firing in short, angry bursts, and inquisitive star shells bobbed up, curbed and broke, drenching the blackness with a deceptive white glare. French sentries, new to the sector and jumpy, blazed away at random.

Withers flattened himself out as much as possible for the bullets were singing uncomfortably close. A nail-studded boot caught him in the mouth while Curialo snarled:

"Hit the —— quick! He's making too much noise."

Thrust in his belt Withers still carried the mallet he had used to hammer in the pickets. He grabbed at it and groped around for something definite to strike.

"I got my mawl," he spluttered. "Where's 'is 'ead?"

He located the German's head at last and brought down the mallet with great fury for he still smarted from the effects of that kick in his face.

"——!" yammered Curialo. "You broke my hand!"

The German was fighting for his life. He arched himself and tried to throw off Curialo, but they fell over sidewise and Curialo still retained his grip on the man's hair.

"'Old 'im still," begged Withers, striking blindly at anything that came his way. "'E's a —— eel, 'e is."

"If you hit me again," swore Curialo in a terrible whisper, "I'll kill you. Finish this guy *quick!*"

The mallet beat a tattoo on the German's shoulders. The man groaned but refused to give up the struggle, though he was weakening.

"Kneel on his back," snarled Curialo. "You can feel what you're doing then."

"Yus, and get shot full of lead." Then, with great satisfaction, "Now I got 'im!"

His fingers had closed on the German's neck. He steadied himself for a second and aimed a vigorous blow at the spot where the man's head should have been. But the latter twisted away slightly, so that the blow was a glancing one which stunned but did not kill him. He lay still.

"Turn him over," wheezed Curialo. "He'll drown like that."

Then they squatted down in the hole, crouching as low as possible for the hail of bullets was skimming the lips of the crater and showering them with dirt. For fully twenty minutes they lay there, waiting for the commotion to die down.

"That'll square us with the captain," said Withers when he stopped panting. "'E's a good lad, 'e is, and 'e won't do nothink, no matter what Verbuken 'as to say, when we brings in a prisoner. Fust night in the sector, too. Prime bit of luck!"

"He bit me," declared Curialo. "Wonder if I can report wounded?"

"Yus! And what abaht me? Me that's got a blooming ear almost torn off? Go'-blimey, I might say I was 'it by a bullet and get an extra stripe." He paused and felt the injured organ after having scraped the mud off his fingers onto their prisoner's uniform. "It 'urts like ——! Might get two months' orspital wiv a wound like this!"

When the noise subsided and the machine gunners ceased fire, they left the shelter of the hole and dragged their prisoner back to the trench where, as they slid over the parapet, a sentry almost impaled them both.

"Prisoner?" he grunted when he had satisfied himself he was dealing with men of his own company. "What were you doing out there? Hunting glory?"

"Aw, Verbuken sent us over," explained Curialo with disgust, hauling the unconscious man into the trench. "Extra duty. He's just heard about the battle of Vaudrecourt and he's feeling mean."

"He may stop a bullet one of these days," the sentry said heavily. "I wouldn't be sorry. Better drag that corpse of yours up to the P. C. before stand-to. It's almost time now."

The prisoner was still unconscious, limp and very heavy. Curialo and Withers carried him through thigh-deep mud, around sharp corners, slipping and floundering and cursing, until they came to a dugout where an officer snored and a signaler sat on a packing case reading a dirty scrap of newspaper by the light of a candle, while his field telephone dismally buzzed and buzzed.

"What's all this?" grumbled the officer, sitting up and scratching his head with both hands. "A prisoner in the middle of the night—what an idea!"

By degrees he awoke more completely and ordered—

"Bring him down. Let's have a look at him."

Carefully, with much lurching and scraping against the narrow walls of the staircase, they carried their prisoner down into the dugout. They placed him gently on the floor and stood erect, sighing as men sigh who have accomplished a dangerous undertaking, and are glad to have done it well.

"Filthy people these boche," mumbled the officer. "Must have been living in a sewer by the looks of him."

The signaler ambled forward, his paper in one hand, a candle in the other. They all bent down to look at the man's face. Beneath the filth the face of Sergeant Verbuken stared blankly up at them.

"Yes—and the prisoner?" inquired the officer.

Curialo shrugged his shoulders. Withers burst out:

"We were out wire-mending, *mon capitaine*. It was excessively black. A man crept up upon us. He responded not to the challenge, nor did he say who he was. We thought he was a German and attacked him. There was much firing—and I have been seriously wounded in the ear."

"Triple idiot!" bellowed the officer, his face flaming beet-red. "Am I to understand—"

THEN Sergeant Verbuken groaned, squirmed and sat up, looking with dawning anger at the faces about him.

At first he was absolutely incoherent, but by degrees—after he had been given some cognac by the captain—his speech became amazingly lucid. His account of the night's events was concise and dispassionate. It became clear that Withers and Curialo had tried to murder him when he went out to inspect their work. Their plan had miscarried only because of his resolute courage. Taking fright at the commotion they had aroused they had invented this "prisoner" story to allay suspicion.

"For this, my fine rabbits," said the officer, "you will be shot. I will make it my personal business to see that you are shot. You are not worthy of being killed by an enemy bullet. France spurns your sacrifice. You march back at once to headquarters to await trial. Sergeant, detail a corporal and four men to take them back."

It was almost dawn when the party left the P. C. and struggled away through the mud. A thick mist, gathering over the marshes where the Somme River wound, blanketed the neighboring slopes. A cold, raw winter's morning broke slowly, but the pace of the small party was slower yet. They had barely reached the opening of the communication trench, which led back through the village of Frise to the battalion P. C., before a weak, dull-red sun shone through the mist like a huge copper coin.

That communication trench was old and uncared for. It went back in a dead straight line up a gentle slope and down into the wreckage of the village. Rain, frost and thaw had played havoc with its sides which had caved in and fallen, so that the trench was little better than a broad ditch of little use against high explosives, quite useless against shrapnel. But it had one point in common with all trenches along the Somme front; it was knee-deep, thigh-deep in places, with rich, sticky chocolate-brown mud.

"A bad place this," said Corporal Sobel, who was in charge of the party. "They can shoot right up it. Step out there! Step out!"

Then a shell, the first of the morning, whistled thinly overhead. Instead of decreasing the sound suddenly swelled in volume until it became a tearing screech. By common consent the seven men halted and crouched down. The shell burst a little way up the trench and slightly to the right. A shower of earth and hot iron splashed down through the fog.

"If one of those shells hits the trench," Curialo declared, "they won't have to bother about shooting us."

"Shut your mouth," snapped the corporal. "You're wasting time."

Three more shells slammed down with a shattering roar which blew the mist in writhing gray columns above the men's heads. Detached by the concussion, a slice of the trench wall a few yards ahead slid down into the mud so that waves rose and lapped about the men's thighs.

Sobel paused and rubbed his knuckles against his stubbly chin. He had to think of his prisoners. They were to be handed over at headquarters to be tried. They couldn't very well be tried if they were killed. Obviously, the thing to do was to safeguard their lives.

The mist was fast thinning; over the crumbling parapet the men could look down upon the broad marshes of the Somme and the rolling hills beyond. Closer at hand by the banks of the canal stretched the broken roofless houses of the village of Frise.

Satisfied with their shooting against that particular trench the German gunners turned their attention on the French trenches close to the canal banks, and other batteries, coming into action, were dropping shells farther back on the concealed road from Frise to Cappy.

"*En avant*," ordered Sobel. "Let us get out of this ditch."

The party went forward with great circumspection and came very soon to a broad, deep crater which wholly blocked the trench. It was a brand new crater, for it was quite dry and whisps of bluish smoke curled up out of the broken ground.

The German rate of fire was growing more intense; the whole line from the canal banks up the slope to a black wood of dead trees on the crest vomited fountains of dirt in great black spouts. The air was full of an immense clamor and a prolonged, endless rumble shook the earth.

"Goblimey!" exclaimed Withers. "They told us this was a quiet sector we was taking over after the Morthomme—and now look at it! Lumme, ain't they fair belting the village!"

FRISE was lost behind a drifting cloud of pink brick dust through which leaped great columns of green-black smoke.

The corporal and his men looked at one another. They stood bunched by the rim of the crater and waited while the corporal bit his fingers pensively and spat out little pieces of skin.

"We got to go on," he decided at last, and had to shout the order twice before the sound of his words carried above the roar.

As he spoke the rate of fire quickened again and there were no more individual sounds but one colossal roar and a prolonged twanging like the twanging of a monstrous harp. The communication trench was being shelled again. Shrapnel in salvos burst against the pale blue winter sky and a storm of bullets lashed the earth.

The first man who tried to scramble over the obstruction into the shell hole got mid way and suddenly stopped. He slumped down heavily and lay on the rim of the crater, his legs drumming against the loose earth.

"Shove him over!" yelled Sobel. "Get him out of the way."

But that ditch afforded no cover at all against shrapnel. Before they could heave the man clear a fresh hail of lead caught them in the back. After that they left their dead in the mud and crawled over without wasting time.

"Three gone," summed up Curialo, "before we reach the P. C. we'll all be dead."

No one heard him. Sobel, crouching down in the bottom of the hole was biting his fingers again, the other escort sat with his head in his hands, dazed by the noise, while Withers lay flat to the ground, staring fascinated at the black hell which had burst over the front line.

" 'Ere!" he cried all at once, shaking Sobel by the shoulder. " 'Ere, you mucker. Can't you see? Rockits! Goblimey—rockits!"

Sobel nodded without looking up. Rockets no longer meant anything to him. He was supposed to take a party of men down to headquarters at Frise—and he knew that he must carry out his orders, whereas all he wanted to do was to sit in that hole and wait and think and wait—do nothing. With a wrench he struggled to his feet.

"We got to go on," he declared. "Move on!"

"But rockits!" yelled Withers, wildly gesticulating. "Them's S. O. S. signals, goblimey. 'Tain't artillery retaliation they wants—it's *'elp!*"

"None of my business," Sobel cried hysterically, his face gray and twitching. "I said 'go on,' and I mean 'go on!' "

"But rockits," pleaded Withers. "They don't send up S. O. S. rockits unless they needs 'elp bad."

"Aw, come on," urged Curialo. "What's the odds? It ain't our war any more. We can't do anything."

"Yus, we can," insisted Withers, glaring at the corporal. "We can go back and see what's up."

"I shall report you for insubordination," shouted Sobel. "Do as I tell you and don't argue."

Withers obeyed. The four of them crawled out of the crater and into the trench. The struggle against the sticky mud began again, step by dragging step while the shrapnel spat down about them.

"—— of an army," muttered Withers. "'Tain't right, that's what I says. S. O. S. rockits is S. O. S. rockits. We ought to go back. In the old K. R. R. they—"

"You give me a pain with your K. R. R.," retorted Curialo. "They're a long way from here your King's —— Royal Rifles. Make the best of it."

A shadow fell into the trench, the shadow of a man running along the top, out in the open. They looked—stared up at him with gaping mouths. It was the signaler who had been in the captain's dugout. He bent down, resting his hands on his knees and howled at them:

"—boche coming over—swarms. Front line's gone—caved in. Fighting like —— in reserve trenches. Wires all cut. Going to get help. Germans everywhere!" He straightened up and flapped his arms foolishly. The hurricane of sound blew his words away. He ran on, stumbling with exhaustion.

"I said so!" shouted Withers. "Corporal, for ——'s sake—"

A shriek came to them out of the welter of sound, it grew and grew and grew into a huge, gobbling, tearing wail. It came straight at them, and they waited, still as death itself, frozen in awkward attitudes, for the explosion. It came—right behind them, ten yards down the trench. It blew them off their feet and threw great slabs of mud and stones and burning iron at them.

After dazed seconds they rose out of the slime, all but the corporal. He lay face downward in the muck, and he had no legs—only red pulp which glistened with a metallic sheen.

They were lost now in the heart of an immense turmoil, for the barrage had moved back from the trenches and had fallen upon them. Flattened out against the trench wall they waited. The storm passed above them. Through the drifting smoke they saw men moving, dropping into holes; rifles crackled, almost muffled by the greater thunder of the shells, then the men reappeared, dodging and ducking, running back with humped shoulders toward Frise.

The gray-green of German uniforms loomed through the smoke—pigmy men slowly climbing the long slope. They seemed wholly absorbed in the task of picking their way over the broken ground, bending their heads to hunt for safe footholds. They fell in clusters and others filled the gaps, always toiling upward with great deliberation.

All about Withers and Curialo there were men now, men of their own regiment, black with powder and streaming with sweat though a clear, cold wind whipped up the valley. With the others they found themselves running back toward the village. They picked up rifles—their own had been taken from them when they were placed under arrest—and they too halted and emptied their magazines and ran back again, and still the slow forward surge of the Germans went on, one line halting to let another line pass through.

It was unreal and fantom-like, a ghostly imitation of maneuvers carried out a hundred times on the burning sands of the Sidi Bel Abbes parade ground. It had gone on since the beginning of time and would go on forever—the noise and the rush of the bullets and the staggering impact of shells, and the race across upheaved ground where dead men lay with their heads thrown back in muddy pools, or curled up as if they slept and were cold, or flung out spread-eagled and gutted, grinning at the sky where the black shrapnel burst.

They came to the outskirts of Frise and took shelter behind a broken wall full of great holes. Other men were there, too, exhausted weary men, many of them wounded. Behind every rubbish heap, in old trenches, and in ruined houses there were Legionaires. But it was a shattered force, it seemed to lack substance. One minute twenty men were lying behind a mound of sand bags thrown across the roadway by the tottering church tower—twenty men and a machine gun. Then a shell struck the road and the mound of sand bags was flung as high, higher than the church tower, and when the smoke rolled away there were half a dozen bodies lying in the road and the other men were gone, drifting away behind other rubbish heaps, waiting for other shells.

By degrees, however, the line stiffened. Up to the wall where Curialo and Withers lay came squads of men, dully aware that some one, somewhere had ordered them to prepare for a counter attack. No one knew for certain where the order had originated.

There were reserves, it appeared, coming up from Cappy.

Overhead in a steady stream cried the seventy-fives, beating a frightful tattoo on the open ground which the Germans were now holding.

"When the barrage lifts we go forward," explained a lance-corporal of the Tenth, who had assumed command of the group. "We're to bear to the right as far as the calvary. It seems the boche is already on the spur of the hill almost behind us."

They waited, tired and quiet, for the order to come. Meanwhile they ate, munching slowly, tearing with their teeth at hunks of stale bread. A tremor went down the line when a newcomer, appearing at a run up the pitted street by the church, told them that the reserve battalions were deploying behind the village, near the cemetery. He had not seen them but a wounded gunner had told him.

Rifle fire broke out all at once on the left, a little way off, among the houses, a quick rattle followed by a sharp twanging of bombs. Through the clouds of smoke men could be seen on the move.

"We're off!" cried the lance corporal. "*En route, mes gars!*"

They got to their feet—and around the corner came Germans, many of them, shouting loudly. They had crawled up one of the old trenches by the canal bank and erupted almost in the heart of the village.

Curialo caught a fat bomb-thrower in the chest with his bayonet. The needle-like point stuck. He put his foot on the body and tugged. Other Germans swirled all about. Withers emptied his rifle into them, and fought them off until Curialo freed his weapon. Then they retreated again, with the Germans, flinging bombs, close at their heels.

Half the village was lost before the attackers paused to reform.

"Go blimey, matey," exclaimed Withers, almost tearfully indignant, " 'ave we got to stop the whole —— German army? Me! And my ear's aching fit to bust."

"Yea! and that's not the only ache you're going to have before this show is over," retorted Curialo, peering cautiously around the end of what had been the house of the *maire* of Frise. "The only counterattacking we're going to do is against our own lines. Guess we'll have to hammer at the gates to be let through if this goes on."

Then a man, carrying a light machine gun across his shoulder, went lolloping by in great strides, crying—

"*Nous sommes trahis!* We are betrayed!"

The nose cap of a shell, rumbling through the air like some gigantic bumblebee, caught him in the nape of the neck with a mighty *thlock!* The back of his head split wide open.

"Let's get this gun going," suggested Curialo, stealthily drawing it behind the house. "You turn that guy over and see has he got any clips."

For the time being, however, there was nothing to shoot at. A great noise of bursting shells came from the fringe of the village, ringing it with fire, but neither side knew who held the heap of rubbish and the broken walls, so that near the center, where men crept about by stealth and found death in odd corners, there was an uncanny stillness.

THE mayor's house stood at the intersection of two streets, one of which ran from the canal banks uphill toward the calvary, the other was the main road leading past the church and the row of farms and cottages which had been Frise.

From the ground floor little could be seen, but a hasty investigation of the second floor showed that its strategic importance was great. The back of the house had been blown away and part of the flooring was gone, but one small room, which had been a living room, was almost intact. A gilt clock stood on the mantelpiece, which was thick with plaster and bits of brick; there were broken chairs which had once been covered with horse-hair, and were still severe looking, though they were canted at drunken angles and tufts of stuffing broke through gashes in the seats.

And there was a sofa covered with yellow brocade, and on the sofa lay a man who was dead. Curialo whistled, very much impressed, for it was the battalion commander who stared at him glassy-eyed and still fierce. He had been shot through the chest and his tunic had been thrown back off the caved-in ribs. A pad lay over the wound, but the tapes had not been tied and a red cross outfit lay on the floor, the lid wide open, just as the medical orderly had left it.

"Go blimey!" exclaimed Withers, awestruck, "left 'im in a blinking 'urry, they did.

Colonel, too! My word, *we* wouldn't 'ave done that in the old K. R. R. Not much! We'd 'ave—"

"Just punch a couple of holes in the wall by that picture," drily suggested Curialo. "We may need 'em."

The sound of exploding grenades reached them, but it was some way off, seeming to come from the direction of the canal, where the German thrust had been heaviest.

"We going to stay 'ere long?" Withers inquired tentatively, closing the sagging door which led off into space. "We're in a bit of a salient, you know. Them grenades is going off dahn on the left, almost behind us."

"Let 'em go off and to —— with 'em," snapped Curialo, an angry snarl on his face. "I'm tired of running and I'm through. This is a good home. We're staying right here."

"Oh, well, 'ave it your own blarsted way."

Withers turned his attention to the wall, and tapped it with the butt end of his rifle. It was all loose and rickety and shook at a touch.

"Seems a pity to spoil a man's 'ouse this way," he grumbled. "Just look at this 'ere wall paper. Ain't it prime? And this 'ere picture, *Retour du Pecheur d'Icelande*—pretty, I'd say. I 'ates to see a decent 'ome broke up. 'Owever—"

He slung the butt of his gun at the wall and hammered away until he had made a hole two feet in diameter. Then he took down the picture and propped it in a corner, face to the wall.

The peace of the crossroads was not disturbed, though there could be no doubt that the German troops were quite close at hand, working their way steadily forward from house to house. There was an unending rumble of hand grenades bursting in dugouts and cellars, and from the storm center down by the canal came a swelling roar of rifle fire. Few men, however, ventured out into the street or across the square by the church for a machine gun somewhere out of sight lashed the road with bullets, so that all the fighting took place among fallen rafters and broken fragments of walls and in holes where the stench of tear gas lingered.

While Curialo set his gun in position close to the window and stacked the clips close at hand with workmanlike precision, Withers went below in search of water and food. He came back some minutes later with many things, but no water. Under his left arm he carried three bottles and his right hand gripped a sand bag. His pockets bulged.

"Must 'ave been the old man's billet," he explained. "The cellar's lowzy with stuff. My word! There's a typewriter what 'ud still fetch a couple of quid in Euston Road, and a stack of grenades, and a couple of staffs. Old Wrobel's down there draped over 'is perishing stores. Shell blew the cellar door in."

"Grenades?" Curialo inquired sharply. "Say this place ain't safe."

"I brought some along," Withers added blithely, shaking the sand bag. "Just in case."

"For ——'s sake put 'em down and leave 'em alone. I don't aim to blow myself up. Give me one of those bottles."

"One's Medoc and the other two's Five Star. Did 'imself well, 'e did. And I got soda biscuits and a snack of cheese, a bit runny, I'd say, but still orlright if it ain't squashed too much."

The cheese came slowly out of his pocket. It was covered with tobacco crumbs and rather dented, but they ate it rind and all and washed it down with red wine. Then they sampled the Five Star and found it, as Withers said with a happy smile—"just prime." They found cigars in the colonel's breast pocket—Havanas with only slightly damaged wrappers.

"This ear of mine ain't no better," sighed Withers, blowing smoke through his nose. "Wonder could I pinch the old man's pad. It ain't serving no useful purpose now."

One end of the bandage was still serviceable. They wrapped it about Withers' head, and his cap perched on top of many layers of lint, fell off each time he moved. He admired himself in what was left of a gilt-framed mirror above the sofa.

"I got a right to be out of this," he complained. "I got a right to ride in an ambulance and be treated proper. I'd 'a been evacuated long ago 'ad I been wiv the old K. R. R. They murders men in this outfit—keep you going till you drop."

"Well, evacuate yourself," suggested Curialo. "There's the door. What's your hurry? Go right down the road until you catch up with an ambulance. You're sure to meet one this side of Paris."

After that they finished the first bottle of

Five Star and Curialo threw it playfully through the window. As it splintered in the roadway a machine gun opened fire and Curialo ducked with great speed. Bullets chipped the window sill and a swarm of them splashed against the rear wall.

They lay flat on the floor by the head of the sofa until the storm subsided.

"Be more careful another time," Withers said reproachfully. "This ain't no coconut shy. They nearly caught us bending that time, matey, and I wants to live. Going to reenlist in the ol' K. R. R., that's what, and make amends for my check—" he hiccuped sadly—"checkered pawst."

"In the meantime," ordered Curialo, after one quick glance over the window sill, "just take a squint through that port-hole of yours. Things is beginning to liven up."

Things unmistakably were livening up, for the Germans, having cleared the houses along the canal bank, were working back toward the main street, driving their opponents before them. Behind the mayor's house there was a small apple orchard and the rusty wreckage of farm implements were strewn all about. A group of Frenchmen crossed the orchard, running fast, and turned to await their pursuers. For a minute or so nothing happened, then Withers saw flat caps bobbing behind the thatch roof of a barn, which rested flat on the ground for its supports had all been shot away.

Smiling joyfully Withers filled his pockets with grenades and stepped to the door, which had once led into a bedroom, but which opened now into space. Suddenly he tore the door open and flung his bombs at the men who crawled with such care behind the thatch roof. They fared badly, for they were within easy range and the grenades rolled down the slope of the roof and burst among them. Those who survived tried to escape and were sniped by the men they had been rounding up.

Withers softly closed the door and tiptoed back to his loophole. Curialo was busy. Germans were trickling through the village like a stream through a broken dike—faster and faster. Many of them tried to cross the road. Some succeeded, others lay where they dropped, and Curialo's gun grew red hot. Shells were dropping in the village again, French shells, which burst among the débris and sent bricks and broken timbers flying through the air.

FROM their point of vantage Curialo and Withers saw a fresh counter attack start from the wood on the hill crest and reach the calvary, where it withered and was blown away by machine gun fire. Another line followed on the heels of the first, and a third came close behind. At one point they reached the houses, broke through, swarmed down the street. For a minute they were everywhere, running swiftly and throwing bombs with the splendid poise of Greek gods, and dying in ungainly, squirming lumps on manure heaps in stinking yards. A little while it lasted. They drove their foes before them down the frightful road between smoking ruins, drove them all the way to the crossroads, and the sight of them brought Curialo to his feet, yelling. Frenchmen saw him and cheered, laughing; Germans saw him and winced as if Death stared them in the face whereas it caught them from the rear as the steel slid home into their backs.

Then, when the success of the counterthrust seemed assured, there came the rattle of a single machine gun. For a second it filled the air with its methodical beat, then another and another joined in, and soon there were no Frenchmen left for they lay in heaps in the roadway, which was carpeted with them, and the counter attack had failed.

Curialo had dropped down below the window sill. He crouched with his back to the wall, resting his chin on his fist.

"'Ere, matey," croaked Withers, crawling over beside him, "don't take hon like that. 'Course it's 'ard lines and all, but—"

"—— bunch of nuts!" Curialo retorted savagely. "They come prancing into the village without looking where they're going. 'Hooray, hooray, the Boche is on the run!' and never a look to right or left to see what's doing. All they can think of is the —— bayonet. They got what was coming to 'em!"

"Orlright," said Withers, after a moment's silence. "Be that as it may, the next item on the program is us. We gets it going and we gets it coming. There ain't a German within arf a mile don't know we're 'ere, and when they gets time—" he broke off and added with lofty scorn, "of course we could surrender—it's up to you. Bit dahn in the math, ain't you?"

"Throw up our hands? You go to ——. And what's the use? They'd probably skewer us for having held out so long."

"Orlright," repeated Withers. "'Ave it your own way. And what next, if I may awsk?"

So the matter was settled, and they drank the second bottle of Five Star, which helped them to forget the sight they had witnessed at the crossroads beneath the window, and the way the men, caught between two fires ran straight at the guns when they found that they were trapped.

But the last bottle was not finished before the assault against the house began. It came abruptly in the form of rifle grenades fired from behind the fallen barn roof at the other end of the apple orchard. Apparently the marksmen were not aware of the ability of their intended victims to strike back. The third grenade hit the broken woodwork on the second floor and blew open the door, almost wrenching it off its one sound hinge.

"My word!" exclaimed Withers. "Quite a draft, I'd say."

Having spotted the marksmen through the loophole he armed himself with grenades and hurled them with great accuracy until his stock was exhausted. The result was twofold: It put an end to the shooting, and it set fire to the thatch roof, which sent out long streamers of black, greasy smoke. The wind blew the flames away from the house and the screen of smoke acted as an effective barricade in that direction.

Then machine guns—for the Germans seemed unwilling to spare any men to capture the house—hosed it with lead, which poured in through the window and beat against the cracked walls. The two Legionaires lay on the floor and waited while the room filled with choking dust.

"What's the use of lying here?" complained Curialo. "If we're going to get it in the neck, let's get it over with quick."

"'Ere, 'ere," approved Withers, "but first off, 'elp me drag the old man off the sofa. 'E's getting shot full of 'oles and it ain't decent."

They pulled the colonel's body off the couch and slid it into a corner where the brickwork was cracked and threatened to fall away. There was a gap in the wall two feet off the floor, and through this gap Curialo brought the light machine gun to bear on the remains of a cottage across the way. Meanwhile Withers, saving the last of the grenades for more important occasions, sniped at anything that came in sight.

But the light was fading. Already the sun was down behind the hills and clouds were piling up against the sky, driven by a freshening breeze. Soon it was dusk.

"There's a guy over there in the cellar," grumbled Curialo. "He's shooting up through a slit. I can just see his flashes now and then. He's been slinging stuff at us steady, and now it's too dark to aim straight."

* * *

ABOVE the wail of the bullets a new sound all at once reached them: A dull boom, then a whisper which became a slithering whistle, and a thud. A roar followed and the ground in the orchard rose up in mushrooming column of dirt and tree branches and embers from the smoking thatch. The house rocked and tiles clattered off the roof.

"Trench mortar," observed Curialo, his teeth set tight. "They ain't even going to send a squad to finish us off. —— 'em!" He threw the butt of the gun away from his shoulder. "What's the use? We're just going to be blown off the map!"

"You wouldn't talk like that 'ad you soldiered with the K. R. R." retorted Withers. "Behind us the shattered line is reforming hitself. Yus! We're the thin red line. Us two! Why—"

A second trench mortar bomb was on its way. Withers waited for the crash with his mouth hanging slightly open, his eyes bulging. The crash came, in the roadway, and the vibration caused the house to sway and sag, and the ceiling opened up, letting through a cloud of plaster dust and broken laths.

"—— why cawn't we leave this 'ere 'ouse and 'unt another one?" Withers concluded hastily when he stopped choking. "We effec's a rearward movement in perfec' horder, as I was taught to do in the old K. R. R."

It was quite dark now, save for a ruddy glare from the remains of the church which blazed like a torch.

"That's the best thing they ever taught you," agreed Curialo. "Let's go!"

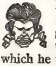
The staircase had fallen away, but they slung themselves down somehow, tearing their clothing and their hands on nails and unseen things, taking impossible chances to get away before another bomb arrived. They crouched beside a gaping hole that had been the front door until they heard the coughing boom of the trench mortar.

They crossed the road in three strides and hurled themselves into a black hole behind the ruined cottage across the way. It turned out to be a steep staircase, and they fell down the shaft on top of a man who tried wildly to bludgeon them with some heavy weapon.

The ground shook as the bomb exploded, but they had no time to wonder where it had landed. They were too busy subduing their prisoner. The man's weapon struck Withers' injured ear and he danced about in the thick darkness, begging Curialo to "strangle the blighter."

Then, for the first time, the man spoke in a harsh and bitter whisper:

"Withers, species of a camel," he said in French. "If you do not stop inciting Curialo to murder me I shall certainly shoot you at once. I command you to stop, I, the sergeant Verbuken!"



HE WAS not at all pleased to see them. In fact he seemed to regret that they had not been blown up. He had a new grievance which he tried to air, but Curialo cut him short:

"That can keep," he told Verbuken. "We get a bomb in the neck if we stay here much longer. We've got to get out of this cellar and get out quick."

"Imbecile," retorted Verbuken, "and where will you go from here if not to a German prison camp?"

"You never can tell. It's a dark night and there's a chance the boche is too busy up front to bother about anything else just now. If we can reach the canal and swim across into the marshes we might get back."

"Yes, and die of pneumonia and be drowned. Crazy idea! I order you to surrender quietly."

"Maybe 'e don't know 'ow to swim," suggested Withers, nursing his aching head. "Fine sergeant, 'e is! We didn't 'ave no non-coms. like 'im in the K. R. R., you may be sure. Surrender, goblimey! 'E talks of surrendering as natural as awsking a girl to walk out on the 'eath of an evening."

But the sergeant declared heatedly that he did know how to swim, and he resented the hint that he lacked courage. He had been fighting all day, he had led the counter-thrust which had reached the village, led in splendidly after all the officers had fallen, fallen gloriously!

"And you imagine," he concluded, "that you held off the Germans until they brought up a trench mortar. Ridiculous! You must know that they could have rushed the ground floor at any time and so shot you from beneath had I not been in this very cellar! I held them off, firing through the grating at enormous risk to myself, performing prodigies—prodigies, I repeat—of self-abnegation to protect you! And how am I rewarded for my help?" he paused, overwhelmed by the horror of the situation. "How am I rewarded, name of a pig? By being made the target of your execrable shooting. You wasted your ammunition trying to hit *me!* Me! *Mon Dieu,* twice in one day you have tried to kill me. It is enough! It is too much! It is fantastic!"

"Let it go at that," suggested Curialo. "It's time to be on our way."

"I accompany you under protest. Do not forget that there are grave charges against you. So grave that they can not be lightly dismissed. If you do not obey my order to surrender before we—"

"And if you don't close your mouth tight," said Curialo, and his voice was hard, "I am going to make a good job of it and leave you here with something else in your throat besides hot air."

Verbuken collapsed. His authority had gone undisputed for close on ten years, and the sudden realization of his impotence left him speechless.

"I'm going ahead," Curialo went on. "You next, Verbuken, and if you squeak Withers'll show you how he used to treat his sergeants when he was in the English army."

"My word!" whispered Withers, shocked at the thought.

The village was surprizingly empty of life. In dugouts and old French trenches Germans were busy putting their house in order. A desultory fire was still being kept up by heavy guns; howitzer shells burst with a dull, rumbling *crump-crump!* in among the wreckage, and from the rising ground beyond the village machine guns swept the streets so that it was unhealthy to loiter above ground.

Crouching by the side of the cellar they had just left the three Legionaires heard a patrol go by. It went slowly, halting and nosing about among the debris, but at last it moved on and was swallowed up in the darkness.

At first sight that village had seemed deserted, but hardly had the Legionaires crossed the road before they were forced to lie flat in the muck while a long, endless line of men tramped slowly by, going toward the new front line; and after they had gone at last there came other soldiers who began to dig a trench along the side of the road leading up to the calvary. Then stretcher bearers came out with dimmed lanterns and took away the dead.

So the three men left the overcrowded roadway and got lost in a tangle of walls and manure heaps and broken plows. Once a shell buried them beneath a mound of earth and once, while they waited for Verbuken, who was forever getting caught on nails and splintered uprights, the smell of rich, hot stew came to them out of a dugout, and they were tempted to surrender.

They came at last to the tow path. Beyond lay the canal. But they were forced back into the village, for the path was a busy, dangerous place where men were working with nervous haste and shrapnel burst with a red glare above the tops of the willow trees, splashing the road with lead.

Verbuken grunted:

"You see—I warned you. It is quite useless. Now will you allow me to surrender in proper form? It is wise that I should—"

He was so demoralized that he was asking privates to "allow him" to surrender. At the time they were lying behind an oblong stack of sand bags piled above what seemed to be battalion headquarters or a dressing station. At all events it was a busy place. Curialo put a muddy hand over the sergeant's mouth and whispered gently:

"One more break and you're through. Keep quiet."

It was then that the German stumbled against Withers' outstretched legs. There were many such pairs of legs lying in black corners of Frise that night, and the German should have had more respect for the dead. However, he was without respect and very much disgusted, for instead of going his way, praising God that he was still alive, he aimed a vigorous kick at the offending limb.

He sat down hard, for his boot met nothing but thin air and his other foot, slipping in the mud, went swiftly from beneath him. He sat down so very hard that the breath was all knocked out of his lungs. Otherwise he would have tried to make a great noise, for he found himself staring at the dead man who, strange to say, was not dead at all but was exhibiting extraordinary signs of life. He was out of luck, that German. The corpse had a bayonet in its hand and the bayonet ran clean through his throat and out the other side before he had time to say more than "agrrh!" which was not sufficiently explicit to save his life.

At the sound of the scuffle the figure of a man loomed up in the darkness beyond the sand bags. In a wary voice he inquired:

"*Rudi? Bist du da, Rudi?*"

Receiving no answer he grumbled and disappeared, but he could be heard talking in excited undertones to some one whose answers were inaudible.

VERBUKEN'S teeth chattered. He had lost all desire to surrender for he realized that if the German was found with a bayonet through the neck, their chances of ever reaching a prison camp were slim. He wanted to get out of that village where things crept and crawled and men in passing plashed dirt in his face; he wanted to stand erect and get his hands out of the icy mud; he wanted to run, and above all else he wanted to get Curialo and Withers in a nice, warm, safe place where he could deal with them according to strict military law. The more he thought about their conduct the more it galled him.

Then Curialo bent over and whispered one word in his ear, almost hissed it:

"*Strip!*"

The very idea was appalling in that cold and drizzling night. His clothes were sodden but the mere weight of the waterlogged wool and leather afforded some semblance of protection and warmth. He tried to protest but Curialo, already in his shirt sleeves, cut him short.

"We're going for a swim in about one minute," he explained. "Come as you are if you like—or stay here. Please yourself."

There was indeed no time to lose for the

Germans on the other side of the wall of sand bags were evidently suspicious, so suspicious in fact that they were unwilling to take any unnecessary risks.

To undress very quietly while sitting in four inches of mud is a feat of skill, to do it quickly is an art. None of the standing armies of Europe have ever thought of teaching their recruits to undress at the word of command while sitting in four inches of mud, and this omission seriously handicapped Curialo and his companions.

The slowest of them all, however, was Withers, who became entangled in his sash and had to fight it before it ceased to coil about his legs. Though he lay on his back during the struggle and tried to make no noise some little sound must have reached the listeners beyond the sand bags, for all at once they stopped whispering and their feet squelched in the mud.

"Ready?" inquired Curialo, shivering in his scanty underwear.

"*Allons-y!* Let's go!" answered Verbuken.

But Withers answered nothing at all, for his shirt was still half on and half off, one arm out of its sleeve, the other still caught in the mud-caked folds. There was not a second to spare, however, and he crawled after the others as best he could.

They reached the edge of the tow path as Rudi's friends rushed the hiding place and stumbled over the dead man and the scattered clothes. A howl went up, a subdued howl, for beyond the canal were the marshes which, though nominally in German hands, were anybody's stalking ground at night, and an enemy patrol might be within range.

At a run the three Legionaires crossed the road, three dim white figures leaping through the air. Along the weed-grown banks there was a network of trip-wire. They sprawled on top of it, and a dozen rifles opened fire.

They got through and over and under that wire, and Withers, the need for silence having been removed, cursed his shirt, its maker and the bitter cold with savage cockney oaths. He slid into the water feet foremost and the shirt ballooned up about his neck, so that he looked like some pale flower floating on the surface of the black water. The shock of the immersion silenced him. It was so freezing cold that for a second he gasped raspingly and was mortally afraid. But quickly he felt warm and took time to duck out of the binding, choking shirt. Probably it saved their lives for it drifted close in-shore and became the target of many rifles and, as it did not sink, hand grenades were hurled at it.

The canal was not wide. Two minutes of tingling agony brought them to the far shore where they climbed out and went stumbling, splashing and tearing through weeds and reeds and the whipping branches of willows—anywhere away from the whine of the bullets. The struggle warmed them a little, but Withers, it appeared, could think of nothing but the indignity of being chased into the water with his shirt on.

"The —— thing kep' riding up," he panted in Curialo's ear as they ran. "Fair choked me it did, go'blimey! Like my uncle 'Erb what was paralyzed the time they 'ad the fire in Kennington 'Igh Street, and the fireman tried to 'eave 'im through the window, only 'is nightshirt caught on the fireman's 'elmet, and all the 'Igh Street—"

"For ——'s sake, shut up!" urged Curialo, "this place is full of Germans."

Also it was full of slime and twisted roots and breast-deep pot-holes out of which they pulled each other with reckless disregard for their surroundings. But the whiplash, which the immediate danger had been to their tired bodies, slowly died down, leaving them numb, aching and miserable.

So cold were they that their limbs became palsied and they staggered drunkenly. When they fell minutes passed before they could claw their way clear of the wet reeds. They lost all sense of direction, going clumsily from hummock to hummock, hunting only for a firm foothold one step ahead.

Across the marshes there was a road, leading from Frise, by way of a broken bridge, to the far bank of the Somme, where a sugar refinery lay in ruins. Out on to the road stumbled the Legionaires, three mud-splashed men, all wet and bloody, who stood in the windy darkness, their arms wrapped across their chests, and shook and trembled and glumly wished they were dead because they knew they were dying.

A SUDDEN crashing sound sent them to cover by the roadside, where they waited, straining their eyes to see through the darkness. Not very far away the noise was repeated, and was followed by a bubbling gurgle, the gurgle of a man dying messily with his throat cut. A scuffle of feet, a curse snarled in German, then an automatic rattled, puncturing the night with red streaks. A voice cried "Hai!" in a high-pitched, meaningless tone, and a grenade burst with a roar. Against the fan-shaped sheet of flame a knot of black figures stood out sharply. They vanished. A man came running down the road. He sobbed drearily as he ran and collapsed almost on top of Curialo. He was quite dead before he hit the ground. One limp hand clawed through the Legionaire's hair. Another grenade exploded. This time the road was empty.

The fight broke off as suddenly as it had begun. The gusty wind and the rain hurried across the marshes and the reeds whispered softly. A short distance away some one groaned miserably.

It was Curialo who forced his companions to shake off the heaviness which dulled their minds.

"Clothes," he stammered. "Guy here may have a canteen—get a drink."

He crawled back onto the road, each step requiring great and painful efforts. He swore angrily because his fingers, blunted by the cold could not identify the things they touched, and the opaque darkness made him blind. But he did find a canteen at last, half full of wine, and they drank it, holding the flask against their clicking teeth. It gave them no sense of warmth or well-being, but it loosened their stiff joints and made them afraid to die.

A great-coat, long and flapping, went to Verbuken, and a tunic which was almost dry fell to Withers' lot, while Curialo struggled into a woolen sweater and a pair of trousers so wet and so cold that he wished he had strength enough to take them off again. They wrangled over the boots and ended by giving them to Verbuken whose feet were badly cut. They took possession of a naked bayonet and an automatic, leaving behind scabbard, pouches and grenades which they were too weak to carry.

It is doubtful whether they would have gone on, so dazed and weary were they, if a field-gun battery had not seen fit to rake the road with shrapnel. The high whine of the shells and the splash of the bullets shook them out of their torpor.

The battery fired steadily, one shell every thirty seconds, working up and down the road with terrible deliberation, which would have been much more terrible had one shell in ten found its mark. Most of them, however, owing to the hard, gusty wind and the rain, burst short, their bullets threshing the mud in the swamps. Still they came too close for comfort.

Bayonet in hand Curialo staggered along the road neither knowing nor caring whether he went up it or down it so long as he got somewhere, either among Germans who would be good enough to kill him, or among his own people who would put him to bed. In either case he would get a long rest. The others followed close at his heels. Whenever they heard the warning scream of a shell they broke into a shambling run.

So it was that without any warning they stumbled into a listening post where there was a machine gun and four Germans sitting dejectedly on boxes while a fifth mounted guard. But the latter had ducked as the shell came over and did not hear or see the Legionaires until it was too late. As a matter of fact they did not stumble into the post. Blind chance having led them to the opening in the girdle of barbed wire, they fell on top of it, for over the hole which was dug in the middle of the road, wire netting had been stretched as a protection against hand grenades too well aimed.

The netting gave way when Curialo hit it, and the rest was confusion. The bayonet, which he had been holding point downward, struck something yielding and a voice cried out in extreme anguish. The sentry crawled from beneath the wire in time to receive on his shoulders Verbuken's heavy body; pinned beneath the netting the others squirmed and made appalling noises and threshed madly about.

The Legionaires had no wish to fight at all, they were much more afraid of the Germans than the Germans were afraid of them. All they wanted to do was to go away quickly and be left alone, but the men beneath the netting evidently thought they were going to be killed and fought hard to get clear.

Verbuken, clawing for a hold on the sentry's back, got his wrist twisted in a vise-like grip and he growled savagely. With his free hand he tried to reach for the automatic which was banging about in the pocket of the great-coat.

Meanwhile Withers lying on the edge of the hole, unable to see for certain what was taking place, chattered excitedly and implored Curialo to tell him what to do and where he was. The top of a very hard head came up and hit him in the face. He grabbed at a lock of wet hair and was dismayed to hear Verbuken cry:

"They tear out my hair, *gott verdom!* By the roots, they tear it out!"

His mistake enabled Withers to locate the sergeant's antagonist. Leaning over the edge he grabbed the man's head between his clasped hands and held it against the parapet until Verbuken, having drawn the automatic, opened fire.

There was little fight left in any of them after that, not even in Curialo who had lost the bayonet and was being belabored through the netting by a booted foot which worked up and down as tirelessly as a piston rod. At the sound of the shots, however, the men caught beneath the netting stopped struggling and a muffled voice gurgled "Mercy!"

"I can't hold 'em," choked Curialo. "Beat it!"

"Get clear," ordered Verbuken, stamping with his borrowed boots on the netting. "If they move I will pistol them."

"More of 'em coming dahn the road!" cried Withers. "I 'ears 'em."

They left the post in a hurry. There were yawning holes in that road and flinty stones and strands of jagged wire. They tried to run and had to go at a snail's pace. Behind them there were shouts and all at once a hand grenade whizzed past them and burst in the roadway, showering them with metal.

Withers went limp in the knees, ran on all bent over for a couple of steps; bending over yet more he slithered to the ground. His companions drew him down into a shallow hole for rifle and machine-gun fire whipped the road, striking sparks off the flints. Inches above their shelter the bullets streamed by, forcing them to keep well down, with their chins in the mud.

"Hurt bad, kid?" inquired Curialo.

"Guts," explained Withers in a very small voice. "Chunk of lead big's my fist. 'Ere, matey, you go hon. No good waiting 'ere."

"Aw, for ——'s sake! Go on—what for? You make me sick. Want us to get killed?"

Withers moved a little and groaned wearily.

"Wisht I was back with the old K. R. R., where I belongs," he began. "I ain't—" He left the sentence unfinished. "Sergeant," he went on, "you going to wash out that charge? We didn't steal nothink, honest."

"The papers," Verbuken answered stiffly, though he lay on his side and a sharp stone was cutting into his ribs, "the papers were left in Frise. The charge is—out of my hands."

Gradually the machine gun fire died down and stopped.

Withers breathed laboriously, with a queer rattle at the back of his throat.

"Could I carry him?" Curialo whispered to Verbuken.

But Withers heard the question.

"No," he said. "You leave me 'ere. I don't want to move. ——! I can't move. You go hon, matey. Must be near our line, else them boche would 'ave been 'ere long ago. You go and find out. I'm orlright."

"But—"

"No." Withers' voice was fading. "Right 'ere 'll do fine. You can come back if—if—" The rattle became more pronounced.

"*Allons!*" ordered Verbuken after a moment's silence. "We waste time."

Curialo swore.

THEY left the crater, the two of them, and barely were they on their feet once again before the machine gun came into action, firing a long, steady burst, straight down the road. Again Curialo dropped, but Verbuken was a split second too slow. Bullets drummed against his back. He fell flat on his face. The machine gun ceased fire, and there was only the soft sound of the rain among the reeds and the voice of the gusty wind.

Then Curialo lost his nerve. He ran straight before him, stumbing and falling and falling again. He beat at the air and shouted obscene things. He went off the road into a tangle of weeds—while the machine gun searched the road for him—and he tore out the weeds by handfuls, flung them down, and trampled upon them. Exhausted, crying with anger, he crawled along the bank on hands and knees until, regaining a little strength, he stood up and walked on blindly.

Dead ahead of him a rifle banged; the

bullet brushed his face, but he went on, complaining aloud:

"Go on and shoot your fool head off, you—"

In front of him something glistened in the wet darkness, and a voice rasped:

" 'Alt! Who goes there?"

"What the —— is it to you?" inquired Curialo, still advancing. "Maybe you'd like—"

The end of a bayonet pressing against his stomach brought him up on his heels.

"Get dahn 'ere," went on the voice. "Let's 'ave a look at you. Keep your dukes up. You're a—prisoner, let me tell you, and if you makes just once move—"

Another voice, rich and fruity and smelling of rum, exclaimed:

"Got a prisoner, Boswell? Go blimey, if he don't talk like a Yankee!" And then to Curialo: "I say, you, what's your unit? There ain't no Canadians hereabouts that I knows of."

Curialo's fogged brain cleared a little. He was down in a pitch-black hole which smelled of wet clothing, leather and rum.

"That you Withers?" he inquired blankly. "Why, I thought—"

" 'Ere! Stop rambling!" ordered the rich and fruity voice. "What's 'appened to this bloke anyhow? Bring a light, Boswell."

The light of a lantern was flashed upon Curialo and he blinked, while the men about him stared stupidly and exclaimed at the sight of his haggard face:

" 'E's fair frozen, 'e is—wandering abaht in his bare smackers and no clothes on."

"Yus, but 'e ain't awlf got a wild eye!"

Curialo tried to speak, but his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"Legion," he said thickly. "Legion—"

"Set 'im dahn," ordered the man behind the lantern. "German or no German 'e's perishing cold. Where's the rum jar?" he went on. "'Iggings, where's that rum jar?"

"By the Lewis gun, sawgint, out of the wet," some one answered.

"That's right, me lad. Cawn't be too careful of Government stores on a night like this."

Apparently this was thought funny, for the occupants of the hole sniggered. They gave Curialo a sip of rum, thick and syruppy, which spread right down to his toes and made them burn. Afterward he was sick and they patted his back sympathetically, and later they gave him some chocolate to eat and more rum. His bewildered mind worked slowly as it tried to disentangle the puzzle: Withers was lying in a hole with a chunk of lead in his stomach; probably he was dead by that time; and yet half a dozen variations of Withers' voice were talking out of the darkness—same words, same tone, same everything.

"Where the —— am I?" he asked when the rum had thawed him out.

"Vaux," answered the sergeant. "Where d'you come from, me lad? Speak up!"

"Wait a minute till a get this straight. Where's Vaux?"

"North bank of the Somme, if you must be told. Hextreme hend of the British line. Now you better speak up otherwise—"

"British line!" exclaimed Curialo, fastening on to something intelligible at last. "Say, wait! Wait, I tell you. What's your outfit?"

"Don't you tell 'im," put in the man called Higgins. "Maybe 'e's a spy."

"Listen," pleaded Curialo. "I'm not a spy. I'm from the French zone. South of the canal. Moved in last night. I got out of Frise—"

"Well, why are you making a blinking mystery abaht it?" snorted the sergeant. "What 'appened, did you lose the village?"

He knew nothing of the day's events save that the shelling had been unusually heavy and the ration carts had been held up on the Bray road.

"Sure, lost it. Got —— knocked out of us. I belong to the Foreign Legion. Swam the canal and—"

"Did you now?" The sergeant was paternal. "Well, me lad, you got pluck. Soon's you feel rested we'll send you back to the line and you'll get into some warm—"

"Wait. What I want to know is this: What's your outfit — your regiment? What's its name?"

" 'E sounds more 'n more like a spy to me," grumbled Higgins.

"Spy my eye!" retorted the sergeant. "You keep your head up there where it belongs, listening for the jerries. This ain't no mothers' meeting. Now, me lad," he went on, turning to Curialo, "you're in good 'ands. This 'ere's an outpost of the King's Royal Rifles, and if you're minded to carry that bit of info' back to the German lines—just try it. Just try it!"

"You're not kidding?"

" 'E means spoofing," translated Boswell.

"No, I'm not—kidding." The sergeant was growing suspicious.

"Thank —— for that!" exclaimed Curialo. "I got to go back a way down the road. There's—"

The men in the hold chuckled, and the sergeant placed the muzzle of his rifle against Curialo's chest.

"Oh, no you're not," he said firmly. "Not in this life."

The waste of time and words made Curialo furious.

"You boneheads," he cried, "you—"

"I'll blow 'oles in you if you 'owls like that," snarled the sergeant.

"You bunch of nuts," Curialo went on. "Listen to me just one second: Out there—down the road there's a buddy of mine—from the Legion. Get that? Pal of mine. Got hit in the belly—lying in a shell hole. And I got to go get him. Maybe he ain't croaked. I got to go, I tell you, because he was in your —— King's —— Royal —— Rifles once, and it'll make him feel good if he can go out—"

"Name of what?" asked the sergeant.

"Withers. All I've heard out of him for close on six years is this 'K. R. R., K. R. R., K. R. R.,' and it ain't fair to let him die when he's so near—"

"Withers, eh?" murmured the sergeant. "Withers! Well, well! Didn't 'e desert from the reserve battalion—did 'e ever say?"

"Does it matter? I'm telling you he's lying out there now!"

"Doesn't matter a bit. Only—" the sergeant cleared his throat—"only we were in the same platoon together. Seems a bit queer, that's all." He paused and then said abruptly, "Right-ho, my lad, I believe you. We'll go out and get him."

They went out together, fortified against the cold by one more drop of rum, and the night was neither so cold nor so wet. It was a long way they had to travel—fifty yards or more—and they went very slowly for the Germans down the road were jumpy and worried. They kept up a desultory fire which came in angry gusts as if they expected another visitation and dreaded it.

Curialo and his companions safely reached the spot where Verbuken sprawled in the middle of the road.

"That's not him," whispered Curialo. "That's our sergeant. He was with us. Machine gun caught him."

"Sergeant," muttered the Englishman, conscious of his own rank. "Can't leave a sergeant lying 'ere. Better take 'im in, too."

"All right—you take him in," agreed Curialo. "I'll get Withers."

He crawled on alone through the teeming rain, feeling his way from crater to crater, suddenly afraid that he might pass Withers by in the darkness. But at last his hand brushed against a leg. He wormed his way along the lip of the crater until his face was close to Withers' face; listened and heard him breathing. A great weight lifted off his mind.

"Say, you guy," he whispered. "Say!"

Withers groaned.

"Ain't you gone yet?" he mumbled. "Go hon—get out of 'ere. I'm all right."

"Listen," Curialo went on exultantly. "I found your—K. R. R. There's a guy used to know you who—"

"——!" Withers cried weakly. "What's the use of telling me lies? I'm done for and I knows it. Leave me alone."

"But it's true," insisted Curialo, bending over close to the wounded man. "You leave it to me. I'll have you back in no time. I'm going to carry you—"

"YOU been drinking rum," Withers gasped. "Smells like the real stuff." He began to believe this wildly incredible story. His whisper became almost ecstatic. "Ration rum, go blimey!"

"Yes. Got it from the K. R. R. Here, get a hold on my neck."

The effort required of him made Withers groan, but he sank his teeth into his lip and held on, long enough for Curialo to pick him up. But the pain became intolerable and overwhelming. At the first step he begged Curialo to put him down and leave him; then as the jolting went on he cried out, one great tortured shout, then he fainted.

Behind them the watchful German listening post leaped into action. The machine gun rattled, spraying the road with a steady stream of bullets. Curialo tried to run. Something struck his shoulder and made it burn. He ran on, shouting at Withers who lay limp in his arms:

"Hold on, kid. We're getting there!"

Again he was hit. Suddenly weak and faint he staggered and almost fell, when a voice called to him:

"This way, me lad! This way!"

Another step and another, with the rush of bullets singing past his head, and he reached the sergeant, who drew him down under cover. He tried to laugh for the sound of the excited cockney voices amused him immensely, but his lungs were full of fire and there was a salty taste of blood in his throat.

Some one guided him to a seat, where he lay stretched out, head thrown back. Breathing required his whole attention. Out of the distance Withers' aching voice came to him and he revived long enough to hear him saying:

"—but only one regiment knows how to soldier, and that—go easy with them 'ands of yours, 'Arry; this thing's killing me—and that's the Legion—"

Then, uncomprehending, Curialo drifted away into a dismal void, black and cold and painful.

* * *

IN THE ward of the Doullens hospital a sister of mercy bent over a cot, bent so low to catch the wounded man's whisper that the wings of her stiff coiffe brushed the pillow.

"It is very unreasonable," she murmured. "But you are such a very bad patient that I shall have to give way. He may speak to you for a minute or so. But you must not talk, *mon petit*, for the lung heals slowly."

She left the side of the cot and came back later, wheeling a chair in which sat Withers, shrunken and yellow, but with a sparkle in his round eyes. On his lap was a large pad of ruled paper. He winked at Curialo and exclaimed in a hushed tone—

"They say as 'ow we gets a medal."

Curialo's eyebrows expressed surprize.

"Yus. We was the last to evacuate Frise, that's why. All that's left of the Ninth. Us and Verbuken. No, 'e ain't croaked yet. Saw 'im this morning. No 'ard feelings. 'E's to be sent back to Bel Abbes pretty soon to be an instructor. Soft for 'im, I'll say. Still, 'e ain't a bad lad. Got us the medals 'e did." He fumbled with the papers in his lap. "And I wrote to that there lidy in Cleveland—about the parcel. That first letter it wasn't strong enough. I—"

Curialo waved the proffered letter aside. There was just one thing he wanted to know.

"How d'you make out with your —— K. R. R.?" he wheezed. "I heard—"

"Oh, prime!" Withers' face was not as enthusiastic as his words. "Prime, but—" he paused and rubbed his nose with the back of his hand—"but I couldn't serve wiv that outfit again—not if I 'ad King George 'imself come and awsk me to. No. Because as soon as I 'eard them Henglish voices—me a-lying near dead and full of pain—Henglish voices which I 'adn't 'eard for close on six years, I said to myself-like, ' 'Ow queer they do sound.' And for all the pain I was in I fair died of laughing. They ain't—" he groped about for the right word—"they ain't what they used to be. No. They ain't cosmerpolitain—like us. Ain't it funny?"

Curialo grinned.

Then the sister of mercy put an end to the interview by wheeling Withers away.

Curialo heard his receding voice saying to the sister in amazing French—

"Can you read English by any chance, sister, because I got a letter here—"

UNDESIRABLES

By

Aimée D. Linton

ALEXIS MARANOFF was an Esthonian. He was also an undesirable. The Canadian Government had said so when it deported him. The Esthonian did not know what "undesirable" meant, but the steerage passengers on board the ship on which he had been sent back to Europe had explained it to him. It meant that he was without assets. His one hundred per cent. physical fitness which had enabled him to walk across Europe from the borders of Russia to stow away on a ship bound for Canada was a "trifle light as air" when weighed against coin of the realm. So also were his resolution, faith and energy. When selecting citizens for a big, new country, immigration officials didn't make such minute, personal analyses, he had found out.

So Alexis Maranoff had been dumped back again into Europe's swarming, hungry hives. But, like stout Horatius rising again from the yellow Tiber, the Esthonian heaved himself out of the swarm, worked his passage to Stockholm, then walked across Sweden to Gothenburg in time to find just the ship he wanted to stow away on for another try for Canada. For Alexis Maranoff had made up his mind to be a citizen of Canada, and when a man of his blend makes up his mind, the gods themselves have to be reconciled.

He found out that the schooner *Gotland* was to sail the next morning on an early whaling-furring voyage to Hudson Bay. And up on Hudson Bay he knew that immigration officials didn't hand-pick their immigrants nor X-ray their pockets for fitness.

He much preferred to work his passage to hiding away in the dark hold of a ship, but he had arrived too late to hire on as one of the crew. He reasoned, however, that anything might happen on a North Atlantic voyage in early May to give him a chance of serving before the mast.

So Alexis Maranoff, his pitifully few belongings and some sea-biscuit sewed up in an oilcloth bag strapped to him, swam the icy waters of Gothenburg harbor one cold May night and under cover of darkness and the noise of loading, climbed aboard the *Gotland* unobserved and stowed himself away in the hold aft among heaps of old sails, ropes and water casks.

The *Gotland* was of antique vintage. Her sides were battered thin by a quarter century of buffeting waves; her spars were warped and her bolts and plates eaten into by rust. In position and appearance she was like an old horse which, having served loyally and well for over a quarter of a century, is at last consigned to menial service, if not actual contempt.

But all these things the Esthonian learned later—with many other things pertaining to the vessel, the crew and the officers.

It was not until they were a day out from port that he became aware he was not the only stowaway in the hold. That his companion in the hold was a woman, he knew by the voice.

Once a day toward the end of the second dog-watch some one came down into the hold to bring her food and to stay with her for a short time. From the broken Swedish of the man and the meagre English of the girl, Alexis pieced together the latter's story, bit by bit.

Helga Arnegarde, from northern Sweden and latterly a waitress in a Gothenburg restaurant near the wharf, was the last of her family save one—a brother who was up on Hudson Bay working for the Canadian Government. But where Hudson Bay was, where he lived or what he did, Helga had no idea. She had the gift of faith. She must find her brother, and up on Hudson Bay she would find him. The man she called "Choe" assured her that she would, that he would swim over the whole bay but he would find him for her.

To Alexis, living on sea-biscuit and water, the food Choe brought down to the girl smelled tantalizingly good. But much as he longed for some decent, filling food, he longed much more for exercise. His cramped muscles cried out for it day by day. If only he knew an extra hand were needed! But he must first make sure that the schooner was well away from the shores of Europe before he showed himself. No more Europe for him if caution could help the matter any.

Chance gave him his desire. A good stiff breeze was blowing down the North Atlantic and things up on deck were rolling about with considerable clatter. Choe had just brought down Helga's supper.

A man's cough once betrayed a city, it is said; a sneeze may do as much. Something above Alexis dropped to the deck with a heavy thud and loosened the dust from the seams above into the murky air below. A sneeze tickled in his nose and demanded to be expelled. In spite of his efforts to choke it back, it finally broke loose, violently and explosively.

A few feet away the girl and her lover suddenly ceased talking. Followed a hurried whispered consultation, then Choe's feet ascended the ladder to the deck. Half an hour later the boatswain walked straight to the Esthonian's hiding place.

The boatswain was a runty cockney, with brains as warped as his legs. He eyed the stowaway belligerently; then, with a fine show of bravery, made a pass at him with his foot. Alexis neatly caught the foot and the boatswain sprawled on the heap of old sails that was the Esthonian's bed.

"Hi'll see abaht this hinsult, ye dog!" the cockney raged as he found his feet. "Come hup on deck an' see the capting an' in 'arf a second 'e'll make mincemeat aht of ye!"

Alexis followed willingly. Choe must have betrayed his hiding place, he figured. But he bore Choe no ill will for that. No lover would want another man so near his sweetheart, particularly under such circumstances.

Captain "Bunty" Brennan, as he was called by those who go down to the sea in ships, had a reputation among his fellow seamen. He was a bachelor whose love was the sea and his home in any port he chanced to make. Also, he was as original and descriptive a curser as ever graduated from the school of profane languages. And he hated stowaways as a Hottentot hates soap and water. He was squat of figure, as square of jaw and shoulder as his own cross-jack sails.

He looked up at the stowaway for a moment without speaking. The look suggested the smoldering quiet of a volcano just before eruption. There was a menacing fire in his crow-footed black eyes that looked from under beetling eyebrows at the Esthonian, and Alexis knew that whatever of justice he might receive from the captain would be seasoned with very little mercy.

Things had not been going with glassy smoothness, as Alexis soon learned. The crew was a dust-pan gathering of many ports, and the captain was having his troubles with them. Even his first-mate could not be depended upon. His second was even then in his bunk seeing multi-colored, multi-legged lizards which had sprung from a case of smuggled whisky. The whole voyage was a gamble, a throw of the dice for a promised good command if he made a success of this whaling-furring voyage. The captain began to see that the owners had asked of him the impossible, had sent him to sea in a poor vessel, with rich promises and a high insurance. His officers were undependable, his crew—to use his own expression—shiftless, brainless and gutless.

Now, as he looked the stowaway over, the captain's face grew stonily calm in proportion as his rage mounted.

"What are you doing on this ship?" he asked at last with deadly precision.

Alexis looked the captain in the eye unflinchingly, but said nothing. His command of English wasn't equal to the necessary explanation. The captain glared and waited for an answer.

"WHY don't you answer me, you —— leavings of a rag peddler's wagon?" he blazed forth at last.

Alexis listened to this unexpurgated tirade without understanding much more of the captain's language than the intention, and that was clearly insulting.

"No spek de Anglesh moch," he volunteered at last imperturbably, and continued to look down at the angry, undersized captain.

"More —— lousy foreign vermin, by ——!" the captain spat. "If I'd my way I'd boil the stinking sons of swine in oil!"

He turned to the boatswain.

"Take this milk-livered louse and put him to work—at anything—anywhere."

The boatswain joyfully took Alexis in hand. He set the Esthonian to work at once cleaning bilges—a nauseating, malodorous job that would turn a Solomon Islander sick.

During the next three hours the Esthonian earned his whole passage. He worked like a rat in a hole, scraping away the indescribable excrement of a whaler's filth. He knew quite well that that kind of work had been given him to humiliate him, to get even with him. But he was working and earning his grub and perhaps when he had cleaned up all the ship's reek and rottenness he would be given something decent to do.

For a week the Esthonian worked like a galley slave, doing double time and the bidding of every man on board, but mostly the bidding of the vindictive little boatswain who fairly tortured his brain trying to devise new methods of humiliating the quiet stowaway, of breaking both his strength and his spirit. And only because both his spirit and his strength were unbreakable did they remain unbroken. Finally he was put into the cook's galley to be the dishwasher and general slop-slusher of Joe Vinetti, the cook.

Then, when they were off the coast of Labrador, Alexis Maranoff got a real job. In the dark the cook tripped over a coil of rope and fractured his leg. As there was no one else to take his place, Alexis was ordered by the boatswain to "sling the 'ash, an' hif 'e wasn't mighty 'andy abaht it, 'e'd be put hat somethink w'at'd tike the bloomin' 'ide hoff 'im, so it would!"

To which aspiratory commands Alexis listened amusedly. For now he was at home. For a year he had cooked for a bunch of prisoners in a German detention camp and had produced edible dishes from mere refuse. Now, with a fairly well stocked commissariat, he compounded dishes that were not included in the list of things the sailors knew about and which brought the first sign of approval from Captain Brennan.

"The new cook's got the dago trimmed," he overheard the captain say to the steward.

It was at the end of the second dog-watch of the first day in his new position and Alexis was ready to turn in for the night, when he remembered the stowaway in the hold. For by this time he knew that the cook and the girl's Choe were one. Now with Choe ill, it was plainly his duty to feed the stowaway.

He got together the choicest left-overs from the supper and, slipping into another bag a bottle of hot coffee, he slid down the ladder into the hold aft.

Walking straight to her hiding place, he found her sitting on a heap of old sails. At the sight of a stranger standing before her, the girl got to her feet, startled, and stood before him.

Alexis knew very little about women. He had lived in a world of men and knew men. His keen eyes took in a mop of yellow hair, somewhat tousled, a tall, well-built figure—quite as tall and as heavy as Choe himself—deep-bosomed and with a good breadth of shoulder.

Choe was lucky, he told himself with a feeling half of resentment. But then Vinetti, with his handsome face, his easy airs and the manners of a prince in disguise, was the kind of man women like.

He handed her the bag of food, explaining briefly that it was her supper. The girl took the bag, hesitatingly.

"Vere is Choe?" she asked.

Speaking in Swedish, he explained to her Joe's mishap. Her eyes, like green-gray woodland grass, he thought, lighted up as he began to speak her mother tongue.

"You are a countryman of mine?" she asked, with a happy lift to her voice.

"No, Esthonian," he answered. Her face fell.

He took from his smock the bottle of hot coffee and proceeded to pour her out a tin mug of it. Her eyes lighted up hungrily.

"Choe was afraid they would smell the coffee if he brought me some," she defended. "I am very hungry for a cup of coffee."

He smiled, pleased that she liked it.

"If they smell it I shall tell them I spilled some of it on the deck and that it leaked through," he reassured her. "But I don't think they ever come down here—too afraid of the dark."

The laugh she gave sounded to him like mountain springs tinkling in the sunshine. He did not stay to see her eat what he had brought her, but as he moved away he heard her murmur—

"You are most kind."

When Choe got around again, which was in a week's time, he thanked Alexis grandly for the attention given to "Mees Arnegarde" while he was in bed. He was sure that he could "ree-ly upon the courtes-ee and conseederation" of a gentleman to say nothing to any one concerning his sweetheart down in the hold.

Alexis caught only the drift of the handsome Latin's request, but responded briefly with—

"Not zay nodding."

The schooner had now entered Hudson Strait. The season, for the first week in June, was more advanced than usual in that latitude. The winter had been mild, the spring full of warm sunshine and soft southern airs. Alexis noted, however, that the captain's face wore an anxious look; that he kept the bridge for long hours at a time. He could see for himself, of course, that in the sunken-chested first-mate and the loose-lipped second, little dependence could be placed.

Alexis Maranoff knew very little about the sea. His ancestors had been hardy, far-visaged sons of the soil. But suddenly it dawned upon him that what the captain feared was icebergs and ice-fields loosened by the warm suns and winds of the early spring and sent sliding down the steep cliff-sides into the bay. But a brisk wind from the east filled the *Gotland's* sails and she was making good progress.

When they passed Button Islands whose shores swarmed with snow geese, wild ducks and snow buntings, Alexis felt something stir within him. The silence of the bay's interior, its vagueness and freedom fascinated him. Here was a great inland sea, as wide and naked and almost as unsailed as when it first saw the dawn. A new world and yet the oldest part of the old world. The chill tang in the air was a tonic to his deep-lunged body. Surely here, in all this untrod, unpeopled space there would be room for him!

And now, besides the loosened ice-fields, they began to meet with icebergs drifting in on the strong insetting, easterly current from the Arctic. The captain changed their course to one more southerly, the south coast being their destination.

Two days later, and the wind veered west. The pale, forking aurora sent up its shivering prongs into a colder looking sky. The mercury began to drop, the wind to rise. The ice began to pack; "slob ice" began to form. Whichever way the *Gotland* tacked it met ice-packs, ice-fields and "slob ice."

Came a breathing spell when the bay was clear ahead as far as eye could see. The captain, having been on duty for twelve consecutive hours, left the bridge with a sigh of relief and sought his cabin for some sleep. The mate took his place and the helmsman was relieved by a square-faced Finn, dull and heavy of eye.

"Keep a sharp lookout, Mr. Watters," the captain admonished the mate as he left, favoring him with a narrow look.

THE ship was doing an easy eight knots on a southerly tack. The wind sang through the shrouds and the ship's gear. From the galley door Alexis saw Joe Vinetti come up from the hold, a satisfied smile on his handsome face. No one else was on deck.

Suddenly there came a crash. The ship reared into the air like a fighting buck, then lurched sickeningly. Above the noise of grinding ice rose the crash of timber, of falling masts and splintering spars.

Alexis ran for the deck where already the nondescript crew had gathered, fear and frenzy on their faces. Their own faces blanched with fear, the mates were making futile attempts to hold the men in check.

In the light of a cheesy looking setting sun Alexis saw ahead of them a field of ice which rose at least two feet out of the water. The western wind was driving this ice-field straight into the teeth of the tide. Waves, house-high, rose and rolled, tunneling their waters into black troughs, the dreaded undertow which mariners term the suck of the tide against ice-walls.

He saw the stowaway girl emerge from the hold, her coat on. Vaguely Alexis noted that from one of its pockets the top of a paper bag protruded. The captain appeared on deck at the same time. He merely glanced at the girl. More than stowaways he hated a mutinous crew, and plainly it was a mutinous crew which now confronted him. One boat had already been launched, and the rest of the crew were frenziedly hoisting a second boat by the davits.

The captain shouted an order, but his voice was lost in the bedlam. Then he drew his pistol. Twice it barked, and two of the mutinous seamen fell to the deck. The others ceased their work of launching and cowered, snarling, from the captain's leveled pistol.

Alexis looked over the side of the pitching schooner, saw the boat lately launched crushed like a peanut shell between the ice and the schooner and its crew sink into the green-black wells like so many grains of sand.

Seeing the fate of their comrades, the crew made no further attempt to launch the boat, and the captain himself then went below to ascertain the extent of the damage. When he returned his face was white and set.

Already the ship was listing badly at her bow; her sails and spars were a mass of wreckage. Not one there who did not know that another half hour would see her smashed to kindling or sunk. Wind, tide and ice were a trinity with which no dismantled schooner could hope to cope. With every rise and fall of the waves she struck the ice, side on.

The captain gazed about him in stony-eyed despair. His eyes, blazing with a savage misery, fastened upon his first and second officers who cringed in the grip of a terror which left them as helpless as babes.

"You —— jellyfish!" His voice held a cold fury. "I've a mind to shoot you both!"

His pistol jerked spasmodically, and the terrified mates recoiled. With an oath of disgust the captain lowered the pistol.

"You'll sink soon enough without any lead in you," he said.

The sailors were gathered in knots, some cursing futilely, others whimpering or muttering supplications to a vague and long-neglected deity.

The cook and the girl stood together, her arms about his shoulders. She was whispering words of comfort in his ears.

The Esthonian stood looking out over the ice-field, thinking. As the captain turned in disgust from his cringing under-officers, Alexis strode over to him and saluted.

"Zur, dees shep—iss—goin' down—" Alexis began in his halting English.

The captain looked at him witheringly.

"Don't sprain your throat tryin' to tell me what a one-eyed jackass would know!" he snapped.

"Zur—dere iss—von vay—" the Esthonian essayed again jerkily.

"Well, what is it? For ——'s sake get it out!" Into the captain's brittle black eyes there flashed the faintest gleam of hope.

"Hif—we could—on to—de hice—"

The captain laughed in bitter irony.

"How?" he asked. And as if to emphasize the absurdidty of such a hope, the ship rose and dashed insanely against the floe, half her forecastle going overboard from the impact.

Alexis wasted no more time in laborious explanations. He seized a coil of rope which lay on the deck. Fastening it about his body under the arms, he climbed to the deck rail.

As the schooner rose on the crest of the next black wave and slid into the trough, Alexis Maranoff leaped, far out.

To the men who had stopped their cursing and groaning to watch him, he seemed almost to float on air. Then, as the ship's lacerated sides smashed against the unyielding ice-ledge, he landed on the ice-pan, upright.

A choking cheer went up from those on deck, and was lost in the splintering and grinding.

And now the captain, understanding at last what the Esthonian had meant, seized the other end of the rope and made it fast to a broken mast.

Out on the ice-pan the Esthonian lay braced behind a hummock of ice, the rope around his body, making of himself an anchor for the rope.

One by one, hand over hand, the captain skilfully manipulating the slack and draw of the rope with a belaying pin as the ship advanced or retreated, those on deck passed over to the ice-field. Alexis lay flat until all but the captain had safely landed; then he scrambled stiffly to his feet.

For a moment he looked at the group on the ice. Their teeth were chattering either from relief or fear. No hope lay in them collectively; singly they had not the strength nor yet the understanding of what was now needed. The deck of the schooner was awash, the bridge and the deckhouse gone.

Very soon the captain must be got across. But with no one on the ship to pay out or to draw in, how was it to be done? His own body was numb from lying on the ice and from the pressure of the rope as well.

Alexis made signs to the captain who nodded comprehension and at once began to come over on the rope. With a supreme effort of his aching, cramped muscles, Alexis began to draw in the rope as the schooner began to roll loggily in. The Captain's stocky body was within a few pounds as heavy as the Esthonian's. To keep the line taut and at the same time to draw in, was the work of a Titan. A grain of faith may remove mountains, but the strength which comes from exerting the will is understood only in moments of direst need.

The captain swung to the ice—and five minutes later the *Gotland* sank into the black well to rise no more—until, perhaps, on that day when the sea shall give up its sunken ships as well as its drowned dead.

ON the floe, following the sinking of the ship, no one spoke for many minutes. Even the praying, the whimpering and the cursing ceased. The awful stillness seemed to smother speech. Around the castaways was loneliness and desolation as vast as the day when the sun first rose over the bay's bleak waters. Above them the pale, pitiless stars twinkled down—a myriad mischievous eyes that seemed to laugh at the grains of human dust clinging to an ice-cake in a bleak and boundless sea.

They had no way of telling if they moved, if the wind were stronger than the tide. They did not know the area of their ice-field. They stood in little groups some ten feet from the edge of the floe, for there the ice seemed highest and thickest, the captain and his mates together—for after all men naturally drift toward their own race regardless of faith or worth—the girl and the cook, and the rest in groups of three's and four's. Alexis Maranoff stood alone, a lonely soul poised in illimitable space.

The girl had on her coat, but none of the rest had thought to bring clothes with them other than what they wore. The wind, chill with the tang of wind blowing off icy water, bit into their shivering frames.

The captain roused himself at last.

"Keep moving!" he roared, setting the example by stamping his feet, waving his arms and walking about, but cautiously and in short circuits. Alexis followed his example and the girl, after trying to persuade the shivering cook to do the same, started out briskly by herself to walk. For both stowaways were from countries where exercise is sometimes necessary to life.

"Two stowaways wanting to go to Hudson Bay! By ——, can you beat it!" Alexis, a few feet behind the captain, heard him mutter when once the captain and the girl met.

Soon, however, the girl returned to her lover whose teeth were now chattering. The remainder of the crew—men, for the most part, from countries of warm suns and soft airs, huddled and shivered together like a litter of puppies in a blizzard. And thus they endured the long, dreary night. Only the wash of the tide against their ice-field, a sound as lonely as the dawn of the country itself, broke the ponderable stillness.

Day broke, gray and gloomy. A sullen sun filtered through the curtaining clouds. The wind began to freshen and veered from west to northwest. Dim, lowering clouds, heavy with storm, hung like a fog-bank on the northwest horizon.

Slowly the clouds thickened. Winter, as if repenting her too early retreat, was on her way from the Arctic for a farewell slap. By noon the bank of clouds began to move upward. Near the zenith it broke into black, fantastic shapes, whirling upward like ravens fleeing before the wind. Then, with a roar, the blizzard was upon them.

The wind screamed and wailed like a chorus of demons, one trying to outshriek the other. Breaking water roared and lashed its wind-driven spray high against their ice-field; the snow drove slantingly from the northwest and cut their faces with a million icy lances.

The thirteen huddled miserably together, the mate in their midst. Shallow-chested, thin-framed—he was not the kind to stand exposure long. Alexis saw in his face a look that meant the end. The teeth of the slim, delicately-formed cook chattered like castinets, though the arm of the girl and half her coat were around him.

When, by sunset, the storm had passed, the mate was at the point where men see visions and hear voices from the sky.

Night again fell and the stars came out to mock. No one spoke now. The blood of even the strongest of them was as ice-water in his veins. The captain sat grim-faced, stony-eyed, mutely cursing the pitiless elements. The heave after the storm stilled; the bay looked like a level, fire-burned plain.

About midnight Alexis jerked his head quickly in the direction of a sound, indistinct but sinister. It was like the faint ripping of calico. The others seemed not to have heard it, for which Alexis was glad. He knew what it meant.

Day came again; the calm which follows the storm brooded over the bay. Like the luminous smoke above a lighted city, a line of light appeared in the east; the wings of a snow bunting brushed against the frozen faces of the castaways. But no one noticed the omen. The east flamed into light and the dead, black, dreary night retreated before triumphant sun-lighted day.

The twelve turned their pinched and haggard faces toward the sun to feel its warmth. For at midnight the mate had ceased to breathe. They began to move their cramped bodies. Alexis and the captain got to their feet together.

Simultaneously their eyes took in the diminished area of their ice-pan. They looked at each other. How long would the remainder of the ice last? Could it stand such another storm, or would it drift to some bleak shore with their stiff, dead bodies? Those were the thoughts their faces expressed.

Alexis answered the captain's look with the merest of shrugs; the captain responded with the ghost of a smile, as hard and cold as the ice on which they stood.

One by one the others at last staggered to their feet, as torpid snakes crawl from frozen winter homes into the spring sunshine. Of them all, perhaps, Helga Arnegarde showed the fewest signs of the ravages of cold and hunger. Her face was thinner and whiter it is true, but her eyes in the morning's sun looked golden and warm.

Alexis Maranoff stood gazing at her, and looking at her he was conscious only of her standing there. His mind began vaguely to vision a warm fireside, a full table, a rocking chair in which a woman sat singing a lullaby. The woman in the chair suggested plenty, prevision, warmth—warm fires, warm food, warm arms, warm—

Something brought his mind suddenly back to objective vision. His physical eyes saw the hand of the girl go to her coat pocket, saw the bewildered look on her face as she drew forth the paper bag. Then, as she seemed to remember that it was the food her lover had brought down to her just before the vessel struck, a glad light leaped into her eyes. Eagerly she opened the bag and drew forth a sandwich.

But other eyes than those of the Esthonian's had seen that movement of hers towards her pocket—a pair of hunger-brilliant eyes, and a pair of close-set, furtive ones. As the girl drew out the sandwich, a thin, delicately-shaped hand snatched at the bag with the darting movement of a snake's tongue. The hand seized the bag a bare second before the claw-like fingers of the boatswain reached it.

THE ice-field became an arena of struggling, cursing, straining men, stampeded out of all sanity and even out of common decency by primal hunger. Fighting, snarling with the savage throatiness of hungry huskies, they surged back and forth over the hummocky and restricted area at the edge of the ice-floe, at times dangerously near its borders. In a few seconds the coveted bag of food had been trampled underfoot into a sticky mess.

The girl was in the center of the milling madmen, unable to free herself. Her coat, half torn from her back, was in the savage clutch of the second-mate; the runty boatswain was reaching for a grip on her throat. But before those claw-like fingers could reach their goal, Alexis Maranoff caught the crazed boatswain around the middle. He lifted him into the air as one would a spitting cat; then flung him crashing to the ice. There he lay grotesquely sprawled and very still.

The Esthonian wheeled on the other seven who were ringed about the girl, seeing in her not a woman, but the possessor of food. He launched himself with the force of a battering ram against one who brutally wrenched at the girl's arm. The impact sent the man reeling into another on the outside of the ring. They spun around; then, seeing how near to the edge of the ice they were, threw up their arms to regain their balance—and arms up went over the edge into the water.

Above the noise of the splash, the heavy breathing and inarticulate curses rose a high-pitched scream like that of a wounded horse.

For now the five remaining men turned on the one who had come between them and food, battling snout to snout as one man and massed as a single unit. And as they rushed on Alexis, they trampled on a man who was on his hands and knees mouthing the food as a starving dog might do. It was Joseph Vinetti, the cook, and when they had passed over him, he lay on his back, his face drawn with pain, the breath tramped out of him.

"Back, —— you!" the captain had roared, but his voice was as a breath of wind through dead trees. He drew his revolver, but his fingers were too numb to work the trigger with accuracy. As easily might he shoot the Esthonian or the girl as the maddened seamen. Grasping his gun by the muzzle, he sprang among the combatants.

The girl now released, stood aside panting, watching the struggle. But her eyes were no longer quiet woodland green; they were the green of storm-clouded sea-water, the battle light of her Viking forefathers.

She saw the hand of an Italian reach for his ever ready knife. As he lunged for the Esthonian's back, her two strong hands—strong with the strength of something new in her woman's heart—gripped the coward's legs. The Italian crashed on to his side, went over a slippery hummock and tobogganed four feet into the water head foremost.

Two to one were now the odds. But the four seamen fought blindly, the red mist of madness in their eyes; the captain and the Esthonian with brains unclouded. A blow from the latter's fist caught the square-faced Finn fair between the eyes. It sent him reeling backward. His head struck the ice with a crash as of dynamited rock, after which he lay inert, face upward, eyes staring vacantly into the cold blue.

Almost simultaneously with that crash came another. It was the butt of the captain's pistol on the bare head of a Porto Rican fireman and was followed by a lethal blow in the pit of the man's stomach from the captain's knee. With a groan the man sank to his knees.

"Back, Maranoff!" the captain shouted.

For, as the Esthonian's fist crashed into the face of the Finn, the second-mate and the remaining seaman made a combined rush on Alexis. It carried him to within three feet of the edge and almost upon the kneeling fireman. He sensed rather than saw his danger, and with taurine strength planted his feet. Then swiftly he ducked. His two assailants went over his back and plumped into the bay, taking with them the Porto Rican fireman.

Alexis heard the splash as their bodies struck the icy water. He turned around to see only the captain and the girl standing. A minute later one head appeared above the water, one only—the second-mate—the sodden, brutal look on his face replaced by one of utter despair. For a second only; then the silver bubbles glistened where he had gone down.

For a long minute the three stood looking out over the horizonless waters, their breaths coming in short gasps.

Then Captain Brennan turned and looked at the stowaways. The anger in his face had died out, the red had receded, leaving the bronze the color of oxidized brass.

"My whole crew gone—in less than two minutes—two stowaways left!"

His strong face worked. Then his eye fell on the cook who by now had got to his knees, on his face a look of hopeless misery.

The captain looked at him for five long breaths, his face creased in lines of disgust.

"One left! And look at him! Licking his chops, by ——!"

The three stood looking down on the kneeling wretch—on what had been Joseph Vinetti, the prince-like cook. On the face of Helga Arnegarde the look was one of involuntary pity, unconcealed horror and infinite contempt. This was the lover she had tried to protect, with the mother-love that is in all good women, to shield and care for! And he had been the first to snatch the food from her!

The cook's tongue with a circular movement, licked the particles of food clinging to his lips and face, even while his face worked as if in pain. Gone was the look of high-born ancestry, of almost asceticism—vanished before the elemental, animal craving for food, the instinct of self-preservation—even as dukes and lords have been known to trample women and children to death in the panic of a theatre fire that they might save themselves.

Vinetti would not lift his eyes to theirs. He whined something inarticulate and licked his bloodless, smeared lips.

"You — guzzling garbage-eater!" The captain spoke with cold, merciless fury.

Vinetti tried to struggle erect.

"You lie!" he screamed. "My father—was—an Italian Count—my mother a—French—"

"If they were the King and Queen of Italy it wouldn't matter—out here!" the captain cut in. "You tried to steal the food from that girl and she shared her coat with you! You're a mongrel—a—a—"

He turned on his heel with a grimace of disgust and bent above the dead body of the boatswain. When he straightened up he looked at Alexis for a moment without speaking.

"What did you do this for?" he asked at last. "T'get even with him for the way he worked you on board?"

Alexis stood with arms folded, brows drawn together.

"No," he answered; "it was—be-cause—he fight—de woman." He jerked his head in Helga's direction.

The captain squinted his eyes half shut and nodded several times, slowly.

"Oh—so that was it, eh? By ——, Maranoff!" he cried, his voice crisp and incisive, "if I'd had just five men like you for a crew we wouldn't be here!"

He turned and looked at the girl, curiously, analytically.

"How did you come to have that food with you?" he barked at her suddenly.

The girl started and a flush crimsoned her face.

"Choe—he gif me—my supper," she stammered, "jus' 'fore—de ship—it hit," she explained.

"And when the ship struck, you chucked the bag in your coat pocket? Was that it?" Captain Brennan looked searchingly at her, his face almost stern.

The girl nodded.

"I not—hoongry den—I save it—"

The captain laughed in boisterous irony.

"No; you weren't hungry then! None of us were! It just means that you've got more brains than b—" He checked himself, then grinned and added, "than stomach. Stowaways, by ——! Stowaways—and I always hated 'em!"

Before another hour it was easily seen that the cook was in a bad way. He had vomited blood and the captain knew what that meant. He lay with his head pillowed in the lap of the Swedish girl whose face now expressed only infinite pity.

"Poor ——!" The captain stood looking down on him, helpless to relieve the cook's suffering, in his voice more of pity than disgust. "Been trampled on—hemorrhage of the stomach, I think. When he started in to act like a pig, he should have made sure he had the pig's thick skin over his belly!"

The captain and Alexis carried the three dead bodies to the edge of the ice and away from where they sat.

"WE WON'T bury them—just yet," the captain said, but he did not look at the Esthonian. The latter gave him a quick look but made no reply. He had heard of hungry men being driven to desperate straits—but better death than that!

By noon the sun shone warm; the two or more inches of snow-ice overlying the blue ice began to melt and to run into grooves and hollows, melting with it the snow from the recent blizzard. The survivors drank all the water they could find and felt much better after it.

By sunset the wind freshened and stood in the north. Night closed down on white-capped water, moaning winds born in the Arctic and breathed over the barrens.

The captain lifted a frozen face to Alexis.

"More wind!" he groaned. "This ice-pan won't stand any more strong winds."

"Yes, yes!" Alexis lied, "de win' it hol' de hice tight."

Captain Brennan gave the Esthonian a look in which both doubt and trust assayed equal parts.

"The government of this country'd call you both undesirables, but by —— if we just had a few more of your kind!" he grunted.

Toward night the cook died miserably. The captain and Alexis carried his body to where the other three lay.

Until midnight the three walked or sat, at equal intervals of time. But at last the captain's eyes refused to open again, and he fell over on to the ice, heavy in sleep.

The Esthonian looked at the girl.

"He has to sleep," he spoke in Swedish, "but he will die if he sleeps there long."

The girl nodded, looking down on the heavy-breathing captain, her brows puckered in thought.

"I know!" She glanced up eagerly at Alexis. "The clothes on the dead seamen."

Without a word Alexis strode over to the four dead men. He stripped them of all their clothes, then, after a second's hesitation, rolled them into the bay.

In a few minutes he returned with an armful of clothes. Without any words between them, they rolled the unconscious captain over, placed under him the underwear of the dead men and over him their outer garments. After which they stood looking down on him for several minutes with quiet satisfaction.

Both raised their eyes to each other at the same time.

As the Esthonian looked at the girl, something in his lonely, barren life burst into bloom. A fire leaped up within him, fed by the fuel of all his unloved, starved life.

Involuntarily he held out his arms. Unresisting, she walked into them. They closed about her, strong with the strength which possession gives. He knew now that he had won her. He had fought for her and, fighting, had won her.

Throughout the remainder of the night, while the captain slept the sleep of utter exhaustion, the two stowaways walked. They spoke little; their kind don't. They were living.

Once they passed near to where the dead men had been laid. They were gone.

"Where are they?" she asked in an awed whisper.

"Buried," he answered briefly; then added, "If we have to die, we shall die like white men and not black men that eat dead bodies."

Toward dawn they dozed, sitting near the sleeping captain and leaning against each other. Alexis struggled to keep his eyes open; it was dangerous for them both to sleep, he knew. Once as he so struggled against sleep, he thought he saw a star which moved strangely up and down the horizon to the south of them. He passed a hand roughly across his eyes.

"I am beginning to see things—" he muttered, "and that is bad."

He thought he had but dozed again when he awoke suddenly. Day stood flaming to the east, and to the south—

He blinked, then rubbed his eyes. But the vision persisted. There, to the south, stood high, rocky cliffs.

"Land!" he breathed.

The girl beside him awoke with a start.

"Land!" she echoed in a choking whisper; "Land!"

The captain sat suddenly up. He looked at the two, dazedly, then to the south. He shambled to his feet.

"Land!" he shouted hoarsely.

Yes; it was land. Iron-faced cliffs which lifted their snow-edged summits two thousand feet or more into the clear blue. And they were drifting perceptibly nearer and nearer to it.

They stood and waited. Buoyed up by hope, all physical sensation of cold and hunger left them. The sun mounted higher—and their hearts began to sink. Land—yes; but not a sign of a valley breaking through those rampart walls.

"Not even a mountain goat could scale those cliffs!" the captain spoke at last despairingly.

The Esthonian made no answer. He was watching those cliffs with eager eyes. He had been in tight places before. He *had* to live—he and his girl, and their captain too.

Desperately he snatched up a coat from the heap of clothes at his feet and waved it aloft.

The captain's eyes went to the fluttering coat, then down to the clothes at his feet. He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it with a snap. For a long time his hollow eyes rested on the two beside him, and a strange gleam shone in them. Then, in a voice more than usually gruff, he demanded the coat from Alexis and began to wave it.

The three waved the coat by turn until they were ready to drop. Alexis himself was beginning to feel light-headed, to fancy he saw things—figures moving on the shore line, a blue drift of smoke like a wraith over the cliffs' tops.

He turned his eyes resolutely from the shore. His arm was beginning to grow numb but he held on. It was their one chance—their one chance, he kept repeating to himself—one in ten thousand, his mind uttering the phrases in rhythm to his waving. Some fishing Eskimo might see them—

He glanced down at Helga and the captain sitting at his feet on the dead men's clothes. Their haggard faces, white in the morning sunlight, were turned upward to the cliffs as if, like the Psalmist of old, they hoped for salvation from the "hills around." His throat contracted.

He looked again despairingly out over the water where the cliffs' shadow broke in a sharp line and sun-sparkling water began. Was his disordered fancy again conjuring up visions? Was it a sun-spot on the retina of his eyes or a real object that he saw emerging from the shadow-line into the bright, open water? It moved—and something like paddle blades flashed in the sunlight.

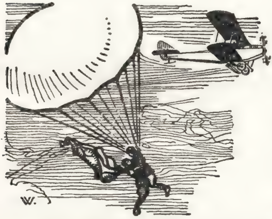
"A boat!" he cried hoarsely in his native tongue.

The captain dazedly shaded his sunken eyes with his hands.

"A boat!" His voice rang out across the dreary waters in sudden strength.

What the two Eskimos in their *oomiak* saw as they drew nearer was three figures dancing grotesquely in the sunlight on a two-acre ice-field, their arms about each other, half laughing, half sobbing, long dammed-up tears coursing down their hollow cheeks.

As one of the Eskimos stepped on to the ice, the three fell into a huddled heap.



NERVE ENOUGH

By Richard Howells Watkins

THE time was when the T. M. O. Transportation Co. occupied a proud position in the latest infant industry—aerial passenger carrying.

The T., who was Jim Tyler; the M., Burt Minster; and the O., Delevan O'Connell, each had a plane of his own. The company leased a field on the edge of a sizable little city and erected hangars. No less than three mechanics labored to keep the ships in the air.

The three partners had a bank account and a growing clientele among the more progressive members of the community. They had carried doctors to patients, ministers to congregations and judges to court. Yes, undoubtedly the T. M. O. Transportation Co. was the peer of any aeronautical outfit in the country.

As Del O'Connell put it, in one of his prophetic moods—

"The day will come when T. M. O. means as much in this country as C. O. D."

That was rather strong, perhaps too strong, for not three days later, quite without reason, Del's motor threw a connecting rod clean through the crankcase. In the consequent forced landing in a pasture some distance from the field, he cracked two struts of his landing carriage in a successful effort to save the wings.

FALLS THREE THOUSAND FEET; LIVES

was what the morning paper shouted to the city at large, and the growing clientele shriveled like a violet on a griddle, and the bank account was not slow in following it. Of course Del O'Connell hadn't fallen an inch; he had merely glided down without motor; but how are you going to explain that to a headline-reading public. It worried him, however, that the cracking of two struts should split their little business to its foundations. And he prophesied no more.

At last the T. M. O. Transportation Co. loaded itself into the two good ships remaining, left two of the mechanics behind and departed for fresh fields.

At another town, smaller than the first, they had pitched their tents and taken a field—by the month. The hard work of building up reputation in a business generally considered the apex of the risky was begun again. They carried hundreds of passengers in safety. Not once did one of the pilots yield to the desire for a jazz ride and tailspin a ship or even roll it over once or twice. The strict aeronautical aristocrats consider such antics in commercial flying equivalent to the employment of a puller-in outside the store in the retail clothing business.

Prospects were good, though the company was not yet prosperous. Then, one morning when Burt Minster took off alone to test-hop his ship, he banked a bit too much just after leaving the ground and came down in a side-slip that completely washed out his plane and left him in the wreckage with a split ear and a bad headache.

That reduced the T. M. O. Transportation Co.'s assets to Jim Tyler's ancient training-ship. They moved on, minus the last mechanic. They were no longer an organization with a fixed base, a reputation and a bank. They had descended in the world to the low estate of gipsy fliers, winging hither and yon, picking up such business as presented itself and landing in more cornfields than in airdromes.

Yes, they learned about flying from those cornfields—more than a pilot will ever know who always has four hundred yards or so of neatly groomed turf in front of him to set his ship down on, but it didn't help their self-esteem any.

And in Burt Minster's big head grew the conviction that if he hadn't side-slipped his bus in that silly way, the company wouldn't have dropped so low in the scale. He had made them aeronautical hoboes.

The day arrived when an offer came from the Baychester Fair for a stunt-flying, wing-walking, parachute-dropping exhibition. The three partners grasped it eagerly. Stunting a ship, walking around on wings and fuselage with a desert of space under you and dropping overboard with only thin silk between you and the next world are all hazardous propositions, but not nearly so hazardous as consistently going without food. It was hard on their pride, of course, for they remembered the time, only days behind them, when no money would have tempted them to descend so low as to indulge in thrillers to drag a crowd into a fair grounds. They were—had been—in the transportation, not the Desperate Desmond, business.

The contract was couched in terms that permitted them to kill themselves without incurring the animosity of one Jenkins, manager of the fair, provided that they did it in a spectacular and public manner. In return for this concession, they extracted sufficient cash from Jenkins to buy two parachutes and three square meals.

And here they were, in an old shack within the mile track of the Baychester Fair Grounds on the evening before opening day, with discord rampant in their ranks, and threatening to blow the company into its three component parts.

At one end of the rickety table sat Delevan O'Connell, a slender, animated young man. His wiry body was so short that he was compelled to lean forward on his elbows in order to raise his angry blue eyes above the two brand new parachute packs on the table and focus them on the big form of Burt Minster. Burt scowled back at him.

"Oh, shut your traps, both of you," growled Jim Tyler, bestowing an impartial glare on his two partners. "What difference does it make which of you does the first jump?"

The gist of the trouble was this: Both O'Connell and Minster felt responsible for the straits in which the company found itself, and therefore each man aspired to go over the side in the new parachutes. Now a 'chute jump is nothing much; but when you haven't made one before, and haven't even a man alongside you who has and knows something about the sensation and the harness, it is somewhat lacking in dullness.

Delevan O'Connell was swift to answer Jim Tyler's question. Already the discussion had gotten well within the bounds of plain speaking.

"It makes this much difference," he snapped, keeping his eyes fixed on Burt, although he spoke to Jim. "The first jump must not be botched."

"And therefore you must make it!" exclaimed Burt Minster, with a great laugh.

Del O'Connell flared up.

"I can not have this outfit broken up because this great oaf lacks a little nerve at the crucial moment."

Burt Minster leaned backward in his chair to give his chest room for the discharge of another roar of mirth.

"Why, you poor insect, you, I'm only about twice your size, but I've three times your grit, at least."

Jim Tyler thumped Del O'Connell on the back in time to halt the fiery little man's response.

"It isn't nerve but nerves that both of you have," he asserted emphatically. "You're both worried about those crashed ships, and you both want to take the first risk in consequence."

The truth does not belong in an argument. This theory of their conduct was drowned in a combined shout of protest, but Del O'Connell was a bit faster on the tongue than Burt.

"I'LL make that first jump; I've got to!" he cried, springing to his feet and thumping a quick fist on the parachute packs. "You can't trust this fellow, and if he bungles it, we're gone!"

"I'll not bungle it," retorted Burt Minster stubbornly. "And as for nerve, I've more nerve than he has language, which is some."

Jim Tyler slumped wearily against the side wall of the shack and waited for the argument to subside.

"I stand ready to prove you a liar in any way you want to pick," Del O'Connell declared heatedly.

Burt Minster did not answer at once. His face reddened at the challenge, but his eyes, as they dwelt upon the parachutes, were merely thoughtful. Jim Tyler plunged into the lull.

"Since none of us has ever gone over, perhaps we'd better rehearse a jump this evening, before we try it on the crowd," he suggested, in the hope that action would halt dissension.

But Burt Minster had by no means given up the controversy. He had merely been planning.

"This Jenkins who is running the fair intimated to-day that he might raise the ante if we pulled something particularly spectacular the first day," he said slowly. "And we need the money, if we're ever to get back where we started. Well, I have a scheme that'll settle this nerve question once and for all, and give us a big lift toward buying another plane as well."

"Out with it, then," snapped Del O'Connell. "I'm willin' already."

Burt Minster laid a hand on the parachute packs.

"We have two of them, and we planned that the jumper should wear both, as is customary. Well, instead of that, we'll both jump, you and I, at the same time."

"And what would that prove?" snorted Del.

"I'm not through yet," Burt rebuked him. "We'll announce the thing as a race to earth, the man landing first winning. You see, you don't have to pull the rip cord that opens the parachute the minute you leave the ship. You can fall free—an army expert fell almost two thousand feet before he opened his 'chute—"

Del O'Connell's eyes glinted.

"'Tis not a bad idea at all," he admitted, and looked upon Burt Minster with less rancor. "I like it fine."

"Wait a minute;" interposed Jim Tyler. "You mean you'll both jump, and let yourselves fall a quarter of a mile or more? Why, that's the craziest—"

"And the man who pulls his rip cord last wins, for he'll land first," Del O'Connell explained. "As good a test of nerve as ever I heard of."

"Well, you can fly yourselves, then, for I'll not have a hand in it," Jim Tyler announced firmly. "It isn't necessary for you two to kill yourselves to prove you're fools. I'll believe it now."

His statement made no impression on his partners. This was no sudden quarrel. Each, feeling guilty, was consequently touchy, and doggedly set on doing his utmost to retrieve their misfortunes. And from this attitude it was only a short step, in the ragged state of their nerves, to an open conflict over the issue of courage—or any other issue about which they could contend.

"Well, Jim," said Burt Minster at last, as Tyler continued to stand his ground unswervingly, "there's another plane here at the fair, you know. That fellow will take us both up if you won't."

Jim Tyler gave in at that, for he saw that his opposition to the plan was only making them more eager to try it. Secretly he nursed the hope that next day would bring them back to rational behavior.

BUT the opening hour of the fair found them still fixed in their resolve to carry on perhaps the strangest duel of nerve that had ever been devised. The three partners kept apart, since talk only led to acrimony, and each at his post of observation watched the crowds gathering.

They came in battered tin automobiles, and they came on foot, and they came in ancient horse-drawn vehicles, from Baychester County and from the county across the Baychester River which flowed past the Fair Grounds. Jim Tyler's airworn but still airworthy Burgess training-plane was the center of a milling mob, for Baychester was not so sophisticated as some of its neighbors, and a flying machine was still an object of doubt and an object of awe. The ropes about it strained under the pressure of the curious, and the voices of the guards who reinforced the ropes grew hoarse and querulous. And word of the race to the ground through the thin air spread through the murmuring crowds.

The time of the flight came.

"Now boys, be sure and give us a good treat," Jenkins, a stout, harassed, badge-encrusted gentleman instructed, as he bustled up to the shack wherein the partners had come together again.

"You'll get it," returned Burt Minster grimly.

"Two of them," promised Del O'Connell, buckling the harness of his 'chute about him, and taking a final glance at the dangling rip-cord and the ring attached to it.

"I'll make it worth your while," the official declared, and dashed away.

At the plane the three men waited, while space for a takeoff in the infield was cleared of spectators. Jim Tyler warmed up his motor, and then, throttling down, left the cockpit and confronted his partners.

"If you're set on going through with this fool thing I suppose I'll have to stand by," he said briefly. "Where are you jumping from—wing or cockpit?"

"Since we're not pulling the rip-cords at once we might as well jump from the cockpit," said O'Connell. "You can signal to us better from there and it will look more spectacular."

"That suits me," replied Burt Minster curtly.

"I won't be able to get this bus up over six or seven thousand feet with the weight of three men in her," Jim calculated. "Suppose we make it five thousand, to be sure?"

"A mile is plenty, since it's going to be a sprint," Del O'Connell said, with a chuckle. "Though of course," he added, looking sideways at Minster, "one of us may not do much sprinting."

"Speak for yourself," growled the other man. "You'll probably starve to death before you get to the ground."

"Remember, when I turn and put up five fingers, get ready," Tyler broke in hastily. "And when I nod, jump! One from each side. And jump hard, so you'll clear the tail."

"Right," assented Del O'Connell eagerly, and Burt Minster nodded agreement.

The infield was clear at last. With a final glance at the fastenings of their harness and the rip-cords that would release the parachutes, the two men silently climbed into the rear cockpit. They wedged themselves into the narrow seat. Then both turned automatically and studied the direction and force of the wind, as revealed by the whipping flags on the grandstand.

Jim Tyler gave the ship the throttle. Bouncing and lurching, it charged into the wind, the propeller flickering as it cut the air and flung it back upon the tense faces of pilot and 'chute jumpers. Far across the infield the plane raced. Finally the wings took the burden from the rubber-tired wheels. The ship, with a final jolt, parted company with the ground, hung poised above the grass, and began its upward climb.

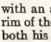
Though it was an old story to them, the two men in the rear cockpit looked downward, each upon his side, and the plane climbed in great circles above the fair ground below. The green of the countryside prevailed, but the brown of the oval racetrack cut through it, and just outside this ellipse was a speckled band of many indistinguishable colors that is the indication of people in masses. Beyond that, behind the cigar-box grandstand, stretched a tightly packed section of black and gray-black, where the automobiles of the crowd were parked. Booths and buildings, gay with bunting, displayed their tiny square outlines in regular patterns around the ground.

And then, as the plane rose higher, the fair grounds contracted until they were a mere detail of the landscape below—the great green and brown squares and oblongs, with larger irregular patches of woodland, interspersed here and there by tracts of well-watered pasture land, of a lush green. Across it all, as if dividing all the world into two parts, ran the almost straight course of the Baychester river.

Del O'Connell and Burt Minster at just the same time turned their attention from the earth to the back of Jim Tyler's head. They were approaching their mark and both sensed it, although there was no altimeter in their compartment.

The motor labored on, and both men thrust feet out straight, and moved shoulders tentatively, as if to drive away any incipient stiffness that might hinder action in that one swift leap into space. Both were entirely at home in the air, as seamen are at home on the water, but neither had ever gone out, deserting their craft for the impalpable element in which it swam.

Suddenly Jim Tyler turned a grim face toward the rear cockpit and raised his left hand, with fingers outstretched. Five thousand! For an instant little Del O'Connell and big Burt Minster turned and looked at each other. Determination was imprinted in the lines of both countenances, and together they squirmed to their feet in that cramped compartment, standing full in the buffeting stream of air flung back by the whirling propeller. Del O'Connell, with an agile twist, got one foot up on the rim of the cockpit and gripped the edge with both his hands. His head turned forward, and his eyes fixed themselves on the stern face of the pilot.



BURT, a little slower, slung a foot over his side of the machine, and with one hand fumbled for the rip-cord and dangling ring at the end of it. Tyler nodded.

Del O'Connell, with a quick spring, brought his other foot up out of the cockpit and, clinging with his hands, crouched on the edge of the fuselage. His legs bent more sharply for the leap that would carry him far out into space.

But just then the eyes of Jim Tyler caught a sudden flash of white from the pack on Del's back. The next instant the great silken parachute whipped out of its confining envelop. Del's rip-cord had fouled on something inside the cockpit, and his eager jump to the rim had jerked it.

The great spread of cloth billowed open instantly and whisked backward in the grip of the wind. For just an instant Del, entirely unconscious of what had occurred, held his place on the fuselage. Then, like a stone from a catapult, he was whipped off his feet and flung toward the tail of the racing plane.

The open parachute swept into the tail assembly. The tremendous force of the wind ripped it from skirt to vent as it caught. Shroud lines parted like threads. Then the silken cloth wrapped itself about elevators, and several of the shrouds that did not snap became entangled over the point of the balance of the rudder.

O'Connell's whirling body struck the tail of the machine. Then it swept past, dropping out into space. But the remaining shroud lines were securely held by the rudder. O'Connell's fall was checked by a bone-jarring jerk. His body dangled below the tail of the plane, swaying in the rush of the wind.

The plane wavered in the air, its flying speed dropping fast under the resistance of the silken cloth whipping backward from the tail assembly, and the drag of the man's body swinging behind. Jim Tyler opened the throttle full, and thrust the stick forward for a steep glide. The elevators responded. They had been unhurt by the lashing parachute. The nose of the plane turned earthward; its speed increased.

The sudden catastrophe had come before Burt Minster had gone over the side. He drew back in the cockpit and stared over at the figure of Del O'Connell, dragging behind the plane by the precarious strength of a few unsevered shroud lines. As he watched, he caught sight of the white face of his partner, and saw that O'Connell, dazed by the suddenness of the accident and his whip-like snap from the cockpit, was just coming to a realization of what had occurred.

Jim Tyler turned and stared backward, too, and then the eyes of Jim and Burt met. Speech was impossible in the fury of the motor's roar, but their eyes appealed to each other for help—for some way out. The plane was diving sharply earthward; to check that dive meant losing control of the ship; not to check it meant to crash at terrific speed into the ground. There was no way of getting O'Connell back into the ship; that was utterly impossible.

That communion of eyes lasted but a brief second; then both men turned despairingly to the doomed man trailing behind the plunging plane. They, too, were doomed in that headlong dash, but somehow their plight seemed as nothing compared to his.

O'Connell had not lost his senses. They perceived that with both hands he was fumbling, working at his right hip. Even as they watched, his hand went to his left side in the same peculiar movement. Then they comprehended.

O'Connell was unbuckling his harness. Already he had unclasped the snap buckles that fastened the heavy webbing straps about his thighs; now but one more buckle remained—the one across his chest. He did not look toward the plane; his whole attention was absorbed in his task, exceedingly difficult in that lashing wind, dangling there in space at the end of the cords. But in an instant he would no longer be dangling. The ship would be saved—at a price.

Jim Tyler watched, paralyzed by the horrible fascination of the thing. In another instant O'Connell would have cast himself off from the plane—and from life. His dry throat framed at last an inarticulate sound of protest at the sight of that sacrifice. The wind swept it away unheard.

Burt Minster, too, was watching. The breast buckle came apart. Del O'Connell was free of the harness. He hung there by his hands, and his face turned briefly toward them. A strained, twisted grin was on it.

A PAIN shot through Jim Tyler's shoulder; it was a blow from Burt Minster's heavy fist. The big man was squatting on top of the fuselage.

"Right turn!"

His voice blared in the pilot's ear, audible even above the thunder of the motor. Jim obeyed automatically. The plane swerved sharply to the right.

As the machine swung around, O'Connell's body whipped sidewise, no longer directly behind and below the tail. In that instant Burt Minster leaped out into the air, all the strength of his powerful muscles concentrated in the thrust of his legs. His body, its momentum aided by the rush of air, shot through space. He crashed like a plunging bull into the lean, small body of Del O'Connell.

The two men dropped together as the long arms of Burt wrapped themselves about his partner.

The plane disappeared instantly from their view; they plunged downward in a free drop, locked together, face to face. Air was all about them; the thunder of the machine died away in their ears. Beneath, the countryside was slowly expanding, opening up before them like a magically blossoming flower.

"R-r-r-r-rip-cord!" roared Burt Minster. His own arms tightened their clutch on Del O'Connell until the little man's breath was squeezed out of his chest. But even before Burt had spoken the quick right hand of Del was wriggling downward, between Burt's shoulder and his own, toward the release ring. He found it. He pulled.

Burt Minster's breath followed Del O'Connell's out of his body as an iron band tightened across his breast; his thighs were squeezed as if a boa had wrapped his constricting merciless folds about them. Del felt a repetition of that shock that had hurled him from the fuselage.

Burt emitted a sound, half expiration, half grunt. His parachute had opened.

It spread above them like a shield. The country below ceased its eerie expansion. Burt Minster's grip about Del O'Connell's chest relaxed slightly, and the smaller man breathed again—deep, lung-distending mouthfuls of sweet air. There was no longer any rush of wind or roar of motor; nothing but a gentle, lulling sway from side to side under that great canopy of silk.

Burt Minster spoke first.

"These things are supposed to handle up to four hundred pounds, so I guess we're all right," he remarked, with an effort at a casual tone.

Del blinked.

"If you'll loosen up on those arms of yours, I'll be able to get a grip myself," he answered. They adjusted their positions, and Del took some of his weight from his hands by fastening his belt about Burt's harness. They continued to drift downward. The sudden cessation of hubbub and speed made this gentle movement dreamlike.

Del O'Connell cleared his throat—and cleared it again. Finally he muttered:

"That stuff about nerve, Burt—I'm a liar of the first water. Nerve? You're nothing else."

"I saw what you were doing, yourself," mumbled Burt Minster, equally shamefaced and uncomfortable. "That certainly took guts, Del."

"I'm glad to be out of that mess," said

Del fervently. "Look! Here comes Jim!"

Jim it was, and he was not above but below them. He was climbing fast, and it was plain to see that he had complete control of the ship. As they craned their necks toward the ascending plane he banked sharply, and went circling under them, waving his hand toward the tail. Nothing but a few tatters of silk and several shroud lines trailed from the control surfaces of the tail assembly. Jim had dived his encumbrance into ribbons.

With the plane whistling around them, they were wafted downward almost directly over the fair grounds. A gentle wind was drifting them toward it, for Jim had calculated well before signaling for the jump. The earth was coming upward now with greater speed, as their horizon drew in upon them. No longer could they survey half the county.

Legs dangling, they waited. Past the eastern end of the racetrack they drifted, and then, suddenly, the ground thudded up against their feet, and down they went in a heap together. The parachute slipped sideways, and lay billowing on the ground.

"We finished together, Del. It's a dead heat," said Burt Minster, climbing to his feet and lifting the smaller man with him.

"Dead enough," answered Del O'Connell emphatically. "But I've a hunch this last little stunt has broken our run of bad luck, Burt. See! Here comes Jenkins on the run, and I'm crashed if he hasn't got his checkbook in his hand!"

OLD ARMY STUFF

by Leonard H. Nason

NAVY men sometimes wax enthusiastic over the fact that the traditions of their profession, certain particulars of ship business and so forth, have their origin in the fleets of Tyre and the navies of Solomon. That may be very true, but the proof thereof is rather slim.

The army, however, while some of the basic principles of battle have not changed since the days of Alexander, can not trace many of its present customs beyond the invention of fire-arms. And it is surprizing how many military terms originated at this time, and are still in use. The words "pistol," "howitzer," from the Czech language; "lance-corporal," from the Italian, and "sergeant" and "musket" from the French came into being at this time.

A lance-corporal was originally a man at arms, that is, a mounted man who had lost his horse and who was compelled to fight with the infantry, armed of course with his lance. As he was a superior type of fighting man, he would have some authority over his new comrades, though not as much as their own non-commissioned officers. Probably the work of these dismounted cavalrymen was so valuable that the grade was made permanent, hence our modern lance-jack, a cross between a private and a corporal.

Musket is derived from mosquito. Early ordnance was always named for some bird, according to its size, of which the falcon and falconette are the most commonly known, so the musket, being the smallest of all, was named for the mosquito.

The aguillettes worn by staff officers and the more common fourragere of the French army, are relics of the time when musketeers wore cords around their shoulders from which were suspended small needles, for clearing the vent of their weapon. In the days when the pike and bow were the principal weapons of the foot-soldier, the musketeers were a sort of *corps élite*, distinguished by their shoulder cord, hence its present significance of honor.

Probably very few people know the origin of the three volleys fired over a grave as a final salute. This custom first originated in the early European infantry regiments, either the Swiss, or those of Gustavaus Adolphus. It was the custom, when a man had disgraced the regiment, to make him run the *gantlope*, that is between two lines of his comrades, who struck at him with their swords, until he was killed. He was not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground nor to have the services of a priest, but a firing party fired volleys over his body, one for each of the Holy Trinity.

ROVERS THREE

Conclusion

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Three Traders," "Thieves' Honor," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

GAVIN McLEAN and Jim Budd, both adventurers and both trying their luck in the Fiji Islands, had vastly different aims. McLean, a care-free Scotchman with a passion for playing the bagpipes to make the natives think him a god, traded in pearl shell and cobra and gave little thought as to what might happen to him next week.

Budd, a serious-minded young American, thought of only exploiting new islands with the hopes that he would find a new wood that would be practical for sale in the American market.

While Budd wrangled with Sir Edward Montgomery, governor of the islands, over signing a contract allowing him to cut timber on Ndonga Island for the American market, McLean was idly sailing among the islands, occasionally trading, and mostly playing his bagpipes to the terror of the natives.

The governor, after a throaty discourse, refused Budd the franchise to cut timber and dismissed him suavely. On picking up his plans and papers from the governor's desk, Budd accidentally took with him a letter addressed to one George Parker, one time his advisor.

He sought Parker out and told him the contents of the letter, accusing him of double-crossing him, using all of the information he, Budd, had obtained about timber, and getting a franchise to lumber Ndonga for the English market.

Parker denied the accusal, and a fight followed. Parker was a big man, and the battle was fierce and fought without thought of consequences.

Budd outlasted Parker, leaving him lying on the beach in the moonlight in an unconscious condition.

At the waterfront Budd met an old sea acquaintance who plied his boat between the islands. He secured a passage to Levuka.

Once there, he felt temporarily secure from the wrath of the governor, who would probably start trouble if Parker was dead. He also felt fairly at home, for one of the first groups he came in contact with was a party of poker players. They played and, as usual, there was a fight over an unfair deal.

THE GIRL screamed, shrinking, and Connolly jumped in between her and Edmonds. Levuka Louis had left the room. Edmonds' heavy blow was warded off by Connolly's left, and he went staggering back from a drive to the face, his hand darting to his waistband. The knife came out flashing, poised. Men cautiously stepped back. Connolly caught up the chair and swung it in front of him as the blade came like an arrow, straight for his heart, to sink deeply into the soft bottom of the seat. Connolly leaped forward and shafted Edmonds between the rungs, driving him against the table that overturned as the bully went crashing down.

The Celt, his eyes flashing, whirled the chair aloft. The knife jerked loose, tinkling to the floor. Edmonds tried to get it but keeled over as the chair came down on his head, the rungs and legs, flimsy things at best, smashing off, leaving Connolly brandishing the back, the seat and part of one remaining leg.

He saw the shine of Wilson's gun as it came from its holster, and he swung, jabbing with the splintered leg. The gun went off, the bullet piercing the ceiling, bringing down a little shower of plaster. And Wilson went down beside his skipper, the splintered leg piercing his right shoulder, bringing out bright blood on his coat of white drill.

Connolly kicked the wrist that still held the gun, and it slid off beneath another table toward the wall. He jumped back, kicking at the knife, afraid to stoop. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Southard at the bar, struggling with two men, two more holding Benton. Edmonds' cronies, these. He thought he saw the fox-face of Louis peering in at an open door, but he was not sure of anything but that he had surely raised the wind.

This was Edmonds' stronghold, Connolly was only a casual visitor and, when it came to blood letting, or worse, he and those who might help him were in a sad minority. Edmonds lay still. His followers might think him dead.

They came for Connolly with a rush, and he backed toward a vacant space at the bar, hoping to get in touch with Southard and Benton, though he saw Benton go down from the stroke of a bottle at the base of his skull, and Southard, none too muscular, hustled on one side. There was a huddle of those who took no part, who were not unused to such scenes at The Haven, the frightened girls among them. There would be no interference from native police. They left Louis discreetly alone, and Louis, he sensed, would stay out of it, mutely siding with his own man.

"It's a scrap you're looking for?" he cried, his voice exultant. "Glory be, you'll get it."

A short, agile man sprang on the bar, leaped from it to Connolly's back and strove to throttle him. Dennis sprang back against the counter, the beveled edge taking his assailant where his spine curved outward as he clung, knocking wind and fight out of him so that he clung limp with pain.

Dennis put down his chair and flung his arms behind him, grasping the man at the nape of his neck while he stepped forward, heaving with all his might, catapulting the half senseless fellow fairly among the crowd, snatching up his chair again and swinging it about his head.

"Come on, you ——," he shouted. "Or do I have to come to ye? *Whurroo!*"

He leaped for them, scattering them at first. There might be other guns to get him at long range. Hands grasped the chair and wrested it from him. Blows fell as he fought back with his bare fists, glorying in the fight, making now for the door, smashing straight and hard at every face he saw, reaching most of them in punches that ripped and jolted and drove with all the power of his shoulders. A good fight was to Dennis, son of a fighting race, like the breath of life. He reveled in the swift exchange of blows; he was exalted and hardly felt those that found him. It was a man's game that put salt on the flat fare of every day existence. He was built for it, his torso wide of shoulder, deep of chest and lean of loin; big lungs that supplied steam for the piston-action of his arms; red, pure blood that nourished muscles firmer and more elastic than Para rubber; sinews that flexed like steel springs.

The sheer delight of contest, the odds that summoned up all his strength and cleverness, brought him into a sort of serene madness, into the emotion of the fighting spirit, where his glands excreted their powerful stimulants and created a superman out of his first-class material. Once in a while a man is so made. His is the stuff out of which champions and heroes arrive. Dennis knew an elation that lifted him into a confident scorn of his opponents, that excited him without fogging his reason, that extended coordination to the supremest degree so that his fighting became a thing of intuition, of genius, backed by power that surged through him continually, that manifested itself in some subtle way—aside from his blows—making them feel his fearlessness, his contempt. So he had cleaned out the survivors in a machine-gun nest, with the bayonet, one against four.

But they were too many for him. He knew that before the vigor ebbed in his veins. He did not forget the gun or the knife. Those near him he kept too busy to even think of weapons, no one outside their whorl of cursing, struggling, striking humanity could pick out one to wound, but they were like a pack of wolves attacking a stallion. If they once got him down it would go hard with him. If he got away with life, there would be broken bones and ruptures. The majesty of British law, enshrined under the red roofs of Government House at Suva, was a far cry from Levuka Louis' Haven.

They cut him off from the door. He tripped over Edmonds' body and felt a clutch at his ankle that nearly brought him down. The bully had come to. He wrenched loose from that, and caught a glimpse of Wilson with his bloody, patched coat, his face malignant, looking for his pistol.

There was the garden. He swung about. He shouted, his voice clear above the oaths of those who beset it. It was a war cry, a challenge, the audible flame of his spirit.

"*Erin go bragh! Whurroo!*"

They clung to him in a squirming mass so that the *melée* looked like the grotesque writhing of some enormous, many-legged, big-bodied insect in pain. They hampered each other with their efforts and, in the midst, there came the sound of thudding fists on softer flesh as Connolly, like a man wading in a heavy sea, tangled in ropes of weed, strove for the door to the back veranda. Once he went down to one knee, but he got up again, two men on his back now. He was giving out the last of his strength. No breath to spare for shouts. Fighting grimly, bloody and growing tired, his arms like clumsy clubs instead of intricate machines of punishment. They kicked at him foully, they punched low and their weight began to smother the remnants of his energy. He could not make the door. They shouldered him off from it but he got his back against the wall for a moment, rid of the two who had jumped him. His fists felt like enormous weights at the ends of limp ropes that were his arms.

Wilson had got his gun. He was starting across the floor.

Connolly's sight blurred, it was an effort to hold up his head, but he looked at them proudly. They had drawn back from him a little, exhausted perhaps, perhaps to make way for Wilson. Edmonds was up again.

Then the door opened. Connolly blinked as he looked at the two men who were coming in, who paused for a moment, watching the pack getting ready to close in for a final rush.

"Glory be! Jim Budd! Now, you spalpeens, we've got you licked to a frazzle!"

THE light came into his tired eyes again, his vision cleared, the weariness left his arms as he charged them once again and the two newcomers came leaping over the floor. Wilson dropped with a slug from Budd back of his ear, McLean tore into the rear of the attack with blows like ax strokes.

Levuka Louis suddenly appeared. With him came Southard, freed from the men who had fenced him off, indignant, convincing.

"You can't pull this sort of thing and get away with it, Louis. They've done their best to murder him. Call them off or I'll close The Haven if I have to go to Suva myself to do it."

Louis was a good judge of men. Southard had been roughly handled. That was a mistake. In his cool senses Southard would not have bothered with a thing like this. He and Louis were too useful to each other in the matter of the price and true ownership of sundry copra cargoes. But he meant what he said. Louis shrugged his shoulders and then Gavin McLean, arrived that evening, and Jim Budd who had arrived earlier and met Gavin at The Turtle Restaurant in a joyful reunion, took a hand.

Louis had a voice that was not to be mistaken, regardless of its slight accent. It had a tenor quality that carried; to those who worked for him it conveyed a mandate. Under its menace the wolves became curs afraid of a whipping, slinking off with tails tucked between legs. Even Wilson thrust away his gun swiftly and Edmonds slumped into a chair, gingerly rubbing a lump as big as a hen's egg where the chair had struck him.

Budd and Connolly grinned at each other and the Yankee introduced the Gael to the Celt.

"A friend of mine to a friend of mine," he said. "Gavin McLean and Dennis Connolly. You should have known each other long ago. It's funny you never met, at that."

"I've heard of Gavin McLean."

"And I of Dennis Connolly. Man, but you're a grand fighter."

The three stood talking as if the room was theirs alone. Connolly with his clothes torn to disgraceful, almost indecent rags, his face bruised and bloody, laughing as he regarded Budd, whose right hand was swathed in a plaster bandage, whose nose still showed signs of recent conflict.

"The last time I saw you, Jim Budd," he said, "was at Pango-Pango, and it was myself who was glad to see you again tonight. I saw the love tap you gave that chap Wilson. By the same token you seem to have been tapping elsewhere. Hand broken?"

"The *medico* calls it a Greenbrae fracture. Got it wrapped in plaster for a week. Let's get out of this place."

"I've got my clothes here."

"Come aboard the schooner," said McLean. "That's where Budd is staying. Lots of room."

"I'll do that with pleasure. I'll get my duds and pay my bill. Faith, that gives me an idea."

He walked over to the roulette layout, the two with him, while Edmonds and Wilson, in conversation with Louis, looking like two boys being admonished by a schoolmaster, glowered at him. He was a strange figure, tattered and battered as he fished the last of his money out of his pocket, separated twenty-five dollars from it and laid it on the red.

"I've a notion my luck might swing before the night's over," he said. "I'd like to pay Louis out of his own money for what I've spent here."

The red won and he let the wager ride. Again, and he shifted the hundred to the first dozen lozenge, cashing in three hundred dollars nonchalantly. With the money in his hand he met Louis midway on the floor. The Frenchman's eyes were like burning amber. A cat's eyes, sometimes yellow, sometimes green and never friendly, though they might be tolerant.

"I'm leaving, Louis," he said. "Your liquor is good but your entertainment is a bit rough. Have my bill ready, will you. It's only for the last three days."

"You started this thing, Connolly," said Louis.

"Did I? We'll let it go at that. 'Twas your job to finish it, I'm thinking."

He turned on his heel and led the way to the cabin in the garden where he lodged, changed and cleaned and got his things together in a kitbag.

"If you two hadn't arrived in the nick of time," he said, "I'd be asking for plaster about my ribs. They nearly had me done in."

"What started it?" asked Budd.

"I wouldn't wonder but what it started over a poker game. I lost four thousand which left me with fifty. Bully Edmonds lost ten thousand and his temper into the bargain. He got mussy and I slapped him before I thought this was his hangout and that he was in with Louis and most of the crowd. It was fun while I lasted. I'm thinking Louis would have let it go beyond the limit. He asked me to go in with him on a scheme once that I didn't like the smell of, and told him so. How are things with you, Jim Budd? I heard you were going to make a fortune with Fiji rosewood."

"I was, but it didn't turn out right. I'm in your boat, Dennis, so far as cash goes. A little less than three hundred in sight."

" 'Tis plenty. Shall we go?"

The bill, it seemed, was twenty-three dollars. A girl presented it to Connolly. He gave her a tip and told her he would pay it direct to Louis, now at the bar talking to Southard.

Connolly introduced McLean and Budd to the latter.

"Here's the winner," he said. "I'm thanking you for what you did tonight, Southard."

"I haven't got the strength of a wet cat," said Southard. "Wish I had. But I did the best I could. Will you gentlemen have a drink?"

"I will that—with you," said Connolly pointedly. "I'm dry as a kiln. Louis, here's your bill. Twenty-three dollars. Keep the change."

The yellow flames shone in the Frenchman's eyes, livid color slowly crept up into his face. He pushed the bills across the bar.

"Ring it up, Pierre," he said in French. Then, in English. "The two dollars over will help to pay for the broken chair. M'sieu McLean, I am afraid your pearl shell venture did not turn out very well. If you had honored me with your confidence, I could have saved you trouble and disappointment."

"That's verra guid of ye," answered McLean, and turned his back on the proprietor as the barman opened up the champagne Southard had ordered and set five glasses on the counter. "Ye've one too many," he said. "As I understand, there'll be juist the four o' us."

The Scot's accent betrayed to Budd that his friend was as close to losing his temper as he cared to go. The barman hesitated; then, as Louis walked away, took back the glass he had intended for him. They drank together in a silence charged with hostility, and Southard left with them.

"Louis is getting too cocky of late," he said. "He has pretty well run things as he pleased. He's smooth, but one time I shouldn't be surprized if he trips up in his own slick. In the meantime he's a dangerous enemy, gentlemen, and he can nurse an injury longer and better than any one I know. I have the name of remembering grudges. I canceled one of them tonight. But beside Louis Renault I'm mild as a milking calf. You licked one of his lieutenants, Connolly, and insulted him afterward. You turned him down long ago, McLean, and tonight you turned your back on him at the bar. I gave him a piece of my mind tonight and he took it from me because he had to. I know things about Levuka Louis. If he tried to wreck me he'd find I had anchors well to windward. Probably he knows it. I'm sure of one thing: I'll go into no more deals with him. I'm through. He'd do me in.

"I'll tell you this much, McLean. I'll bet a thousand dollars to a hundred that the tip you got about that trip of yours he twitted you with—came from Louis in the first place."

"He as good as told me that," said McLean. "I'm no that slow on the uptake. I might have known it but it seemed straight enough. He's clever."

"As for you, Mr. Budd," Southard said as they stood together before taking their different ways, "you laid out Wilson sweetly tonight. There was a time when I could crack a man and drop him like that quite easily.

"You saved him from murder, though that would have been hushed up, but you'll not be finding him grateful. If I were you three—and I'm fully valuing your courage—I'd leave Levuka alone for a while. I think I know what I'm talking about.

"Louis and his gang will do their best to get even with you and there is small use in denying the fact that he pretty well owns the community, brown, white and tan. He'll not show in it. He's the monkey that lets the cats draw the chestnuts. But he'll do you in if he can and he'll lay awake a night or two to figure out a plan. I couldn't fight with you, Connolly, but I can warn you and I'm doing it in earnest. You've made him sing small in his own place, he'll not forgive that.

"By the eternal, Connolly, the thing I liked best of all was your picking the roulette game for three hundred dollars after all that happened."

"Two hundred and seventy-five. I held out twenty-five in case I lost. But I sort of figured it was coming to me. Luck usually evens up if you treat her like a lady."

CHAPTER IV

ABOARD THE *MBELEMA*

"KURILI died the next day from gangrene. Nothing could have saved him, I think. The poison was in his system beyond all drugs or amputation. I did what I could, and he was grateful. I had another talk with him, and what he told me took me back to the eastern end of Bauro and to Tipye Island. Here's the charm, what do you make of it?"

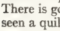
McLean handed it to Budd who examined it and passed it to Connolly.

"Coin of some sort, of course," he said. "Been rubbed till the design is worn off. I'd suggest Spanish."

"It's a doubloon, a *doblon*," said Connolly authoritatively. "I've seen its like. When Howard and Hawkins and Drake broke up the Spanish Armada and chivvied them up into your territory—" he nodded at MacLean—"they tell me the ships went far north and then turned west and so south again. What the British cannon hadn't been able to finish, the storms did. One was wrecked off Carnsore Point. The British were for putting all the shipwrecked crew to the sword, but when they got to Wexford they were told they were all drowned. They say there were gallant gentlemen among the Dons and the Irish were ever hospitable.

" 'Tis no disgrace to have a Spanish ancestor in Wexford, dating back to the time of Philip. Sure, we were of the same faith, and because they were enemies to England, did that make them foes of ours? I have been shown the chest, all strapped with wrought iron, that came ashore from the wreck to our house, and with it the owner. 'Tis said he wooed and won my great-great grandmother or her grandmother, as the case may be, and learning the language, took the name of Connolly to avoid unpleasantness.

"As 'twas the old tongue we spoke then, 'twas no Englishman could tell did he have a good accent or a poor one. And there have been black Irish since the days of the Phœnicians. We're a special blend. Doubtless the gold was welcome and well spent, but there were a few coins handed down as heirlooms the same as this, coined in the same reign, I'll warrant. And there were others washed ashore long afterward, sand-worn and passed from hand to hand among ourselves, for the English would have taken them without exchange. Worth about sixteen dollars. It's Spanish sure enough, and 'tis not hard to guess how a Spanish coin of that date would get in the Solomons. Chap named Mendana discovered them about the end of the sixteenth century, didn't he? Named 'em after King Solomon because he thought the beaches were gold, or said he thought so. Those old voyagers loved to spring yarns when they got back. There is gold in Bougainville, at that. I've seen a quill full of colors. It's a bit hard to get at. The natives take you to their stomachs instead of their hearts. I suppose one of Mendana's men dropped it on the beach and the bushman's great-great-great grandfather picked it up and made a charm out of it. Funny how things come round. Here I come from Wexford with my lucky piece, all the way here to find its double. If it's a mascot it didn't work with me last night at Louis', any more than it did for your Kurili."



HE TOOK a coin from his watch pocket and tossed it on the cabin table where it spun about before it settled down beside the other. It was in fairly good preservation—the obverse, with the head of Philip the Second of Spain distinct enough, and the date of coinage 1565; all clearer than the blurred reverse. By comparison, the almost obliterated design of Kurili's coin became identified.

"Mendana came out in 1567," said Connolly. "Tried again in 1595 but he didn't get beyond the Carolines. Looks as if that piece must have been fresh and sharp from the mint when his officer dropped it. I don't imagine the ordinary seamen or soldiers had many. Go ahead, Gavin."

"It wasna dropped on the beach," said McLean, his eyes shining, his speech burring to dialect with his suppressed excitement. "Kurili told me that every man of Niku's tribe wears one or more of these coins and that the wizard Ngati has a regular jacket of them he wears on state occasions. Niku probably sports a lot, but Ngati's the big man o' the tribe. 'Tis hard to get a salt water man to count much beyond his fingers and toes but, as well as I could make out fra Kurili, there must be well over two hundred tribesmen. There should be at least five hundred coins among them and I'm bein' conservative i' the estimate. The gold is worn down but then gold's advanced in value a lot since they were coined. There should be eight thousand dollars in sight and that is a neat sum to be sure o'. It's no a fortune divided into three but it's more than a mickle, an' we may find a muckle before we get through.

"I'll tell ye what makes me think that. There was no one, living or dead on Tipye when I got there. Niku had come down an' cleaned them out to even up for his man. Glad of the excuse to fill the larder, maist likely. They kept the women and ate the men, I'm thinkin'. As for the babies, they practice infanticide i' the Solomons. Accordin' to oor lights 'tis horrible, but when the missionary asks them why they eat man meat, they ask him 'Why not?' an' he's never been able to answer them properly. Tellin' them he thinks it sinful just makes them think he's a fool.

"Then I took a look at the beach, for I had an idea i' my heid I might find something. I'm no caring so much for explorations in the bush wi'out a purpose, ye ken, not being over tired o' life. But I was curious. That's a vice i' a woman but it's sometimes a virtue i' a man. An' I found something out o' the ordinar'.

"Budd, will ye pass the Glenlivet? 'Tis nearest to you an' talkin' is dry work. If there's no ice left i' the bowl, howl for Kekko."

McLean sat back and lit his pipe leisurely before he poured his drink. He was manifestly enjoying their suspense.

"Man," said Connolly, "have your drink if you must. You're a friend of Jim Budd and he's a friend of mine, but you're provoking me to bloody murder. It may be your Scotch sense of humor to make the story a serial, but I smell a mouse in that Bauru bush, a gold mouse with diamond eyes and a silver tail and whiskers. Give him his drink Jim, and make it stiff enough to loosen his Scotch tongue."

McLean insisted upon the three glasses being filled.

"We'll be wantin' to drink my health in a minute," he said. " 'Tis not my Scotch humor, Connolly, which is a far subtler thing than Irish wit, but my sense o' the dramatic, gained fra the study o' the works o' Sir Walter Scott, grandest o' a' novelists. Losh, lads, I'm givin' ye a treat you dinna appreciate. A clumsy talker would ha' blurted it a' oot at one crack. News like this should be parceled oot, a nip at a time, like auld whisky. A thrill to every sip an' swallow. I'm givin' you excitation, I'm stimulatin' your imaginations. You should be gey gratefu' to me."

"If Dennis decides to murder you I'll help hide the body or swear you committed suicide," said Budd. "On with your wild tale. All you have to show for it so far is a gold coin that Dennis has the mate of. Go on."

"Suspense is the supreme test o' the story teller," answered Gavin. "At first I found nothing. The mon who talked about findin' a needle in a haystack never looked for a lost anchor in a South Sea jungle. But I found one, an' next a cannon, all pitted an' rust-eaten, wreathed about a piece of ordnance like the ones they carried on the Armada. For I've seen one of them in the museum at Perth.

"The next was a mass o' vines an' orchids, all bloomin' white and fragrant. 'Twas peculiar, the way they grew so, as if they covered a rock. Now you can make your guesses."

"A galleon," cried Connolly, "swept over the reef in a typhoon."

"There is the hull of a big ship half a mile inland at Temo in the Marshalls," said Budd. "An old East Indiaman."

"Aye, 'twas just that. You may now drink my health. I doot if it was any of Mendana's ships. One of the Philippine fleet more like. They brought back gold from the islands as well as pearls. Aside from what coinage they carried i' the cabin. But I didna find aught but the moulderin' ribs, ant-eaten and bored most of them. The vines had lifted some of them. The hull had fallen in. You could make oot a dim idea o' the great poop castle.

"Na doot it was promptly gutted by the tribesmen. What o' the crew got ashore wad gang the way o' the ovens. Doubtless they fought. It wad ha' been wi' Niku's ancestors. An' the wizard o' that day must ha' got the best o' the spoil. 'Tis hard to say what they'd take an' what they'd leave. Some day it may pay to clear away a' the vines but I'm thinkin' there'll be enough to mak' it worth while to pay a visit to Niku an' Ngati.

"I've got the schooner but that's a'. You twa can put up enough silver between you to fit out. We're a' three at a loose end?"

"It sounds good but I imagine it will be no picnic. I've a constitutional objection to being a funeral-baked meat," said Budd, his eyes belying his apparent hesitancy. "If there are two hundred tribesmen with an inherited taste for white *kaikai* we may find it slightly difficult to collect. I've had some experience with bush trails and bushmen and they never struck me as easy to handle."

"It's a good gamble," said Connolly. "Not to mention a fighting chance. Have you got a plan, McLean, or do you propose to swap off the coins for poisoned gum drops? You can count me in with Budd at that. It sounds interesting."

"It's no' so difficult as you micht imagine," said McLean. "There are risks, I'm granting you. If either o' us were married men I'd not think of it. They kill whites when they can get at them in the Solomons, and they're a treacherous, bloodthirsty, dirty lot. But I know something o' their ways. I've been i' their villages an' I've talked wi' their wizards. As a matter of fact I've a wee reputation as a wizard mysel', owin' to a gift I ha' wi' music. To charm the savage breast. An' other matters.

"They're no' great at reasonin'. Wi' the tribe at large it's a question o' mob psychology. They're like a lot o' curious apes, mischievous, wi' the minds o' chimpanzees. Aye, shiftin' about like a compass i' the middle o' a steel plant. The chiefs are better fed than the rest, an' a mite more intelligent. The big man is always the wizard an' that job runs i' the family for generations. He's got the brains o' the outfit.

"Gin you can handle the wizard, you can do anything. They're afraid o' the white man's *mana*. They don't know what you've got up your sleeve. I wouldn't wonder but what we could swap off something for the coins if we can interest Ngati. The chief danger will be comin' back doon those trails. Ngati may have an idea that since he's got whatever we hand him, he might as well have his jacket back again. Then there'll be trouble.

"I can talk their dialect. You chaps baith know something o' Melanesian. You can pick it up. We'll ha' to rig a yarn to suit why we want the coins. That won't be hard. Will ye come?"

"That's a foolish question, McLean," said Connolly. "Ask us if we'll stay behind. How about it, Jim?"

"We might drink Gavin's health again?" Budd suggested.

The next two days were busy ones. The Yap crew was paid off and signed on again. McLean confined himself to outfitting the schooner, Connolly and Budd saw to provisions and armament. They saw nothing of Levuka Louis, of Edmonds or Wilson. Once they saw Southard.

"I'm glad you're leaving Levuka," he said. "After pearls?"

"We're hoping to find some," said Budd.

"Then I'll not ask you where you're going. But look out for Louis. He'll do you some deviltry if he can. Edmonds figures the only way he can hold up his head with his gang is to get even with you chaps. Lucky there isn't any lien on McLean's schooner. Louis would get hold of it and tie you up."

"We're off tomorrow," said Budd. "Edmonds can stew in his own juice."

THERE seemed no cloud on the horizon of their adventuring. The gold was worth while, but it was the glamor of the trip that gripped them all. That night a young half-blood paddled off to the schooner and said he was a brother of the girl who had spilled the wine on Edmonds. His sister, he said, had told him to warn the white men that Edmonds had sworn to turn a trick on them. The lad seemed impressed with Edmonds' capacity in that direction. And fearful on his own account.

"Suppose he know I come along this ship," he said, "he kill me —— quick. I good fellow along cabin. I like come along with you. Plenty smart, help cook, can make um bed. That Louis he knew everything. Too much I 'fraid to go ashore. My sister she speak I ask you let me come along of you."

McLean put some questions to him. They could use an aid to Kekko with the three of them wanting cabin chow. He could tidy up the staterooms. He seemed smart enough.

"These half-bloods are inclined to be cheeky," said McLean, "but Kekko will take that out of him. He seems smart."

The boy was hired, delighted; introduced to Kekko as his assistant and promptly proceeded to make himself useful. But he kept below decks. He seemed to be afraid that Louis, the all-powerful, would discover him but was more afraid to go ashore, certain he would be seen going back and landing if he had not been noticed coming off.

They were due to sail at three in the afternoon, and the *Mbelema* was made ready for the tide, moored out in the harbor. There was a good breeze blowing, the rains were practically over and they seemed likely to have a slashing southeast trade behind them all the way to their destination.

McLean and Budd were aboard, the latter supervising the handy stowage of supplies when Connolly, who had stayed ashore to get some ammunition that had been delayed, came off in a fast launch. He sprang over the rail and went swiftly aft to McLean, releasing the launch, that sped shoreward.

"There's the —— to pay, Mac," he said, in a low voice. "Jim below?"

"Yes."

Connolly glanced toward the wharves anxiously.

"Ready to start?"

"Tide's slack. I was waiting for the turn."

"You can get out though right away?"

"Of course, with this breeze. Go out like a liner. What's wrong?"

"You're a close friend of Jim's, like I am. He hasn't said much about that row he had in Suva but, look here, you don't believe Jim would murder anybody, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Then slip that mooring. No sense in telling Jim till we get to sea. He might have some crazy notion of staying to face the music. That chap Parker was found dead on the beach. There's a warrant out for Jim. Southard tipped me off. Wireless from Suva. You know what chance he'd have. They try you today and hang you tomorrow over here. The commissioner is a regular Lord Jeffries.

"They'll be out in a jiffy. We've got to get Jim away. Then they'll look around for some one else, perhaps. We've got no money. And that —— Louis will jump at the chance. Cook up evidence down in Suva. There comes the police launch, now."

McLean looked over the rail. The launch was setting out, the British flag of authority flying, the scarlet kilts of the native constabulary plain in the stern. He rapped out instant orders. The jib and staysail rose, the big mainsail swayed up under the imperative orders of Kiyuku. Then the foresail, as they slipped mooring and the *Mbelema*, began to glide through the water. A hoot came from the launch, then the bark of a bowgun.

"That's only a pop-pistol," said McLean. "And that tub can't make six knots. There isn't a gunboat within five hundred miles. They sent her to the Tongas last week. They can get her by wireless but they don't know where we're going. If they did they couldn't catch us. We're off."

"I'll go and keep Jim below," said Connolly. "Tell him all about it later. He'll think we've got under way a little ahead of time. I'll tell him you wanted to use the breeze."

The *Mbelema* heeled over as the sheets were hauled in. The launch was a third of a mile behind when they made the passage. When they tacked and were heading well into the Vita Ivu Passage between the two main islands, the pursuit was only a bobbing speck, hopelessly distanced; the strong wind was astern, the sheets out, a spinnaker set to a boom, the schooner seething along at eleven knots.

Kekko came on deck, complaining of the absence of Joni, the half-blood assistant. One of the crew jabbered something and Kekko spluttered angrily. The Yap boys knew that something was up, but they had but one master. They did not "belong along" Fiji. But the boy, it appeared, had jumped overboard and started to swim to a native firewood schooner not far away just as they slipped the mooring.

"Tha —— fool think all same polisi boat come for him," Kekko told his skipper.

McLean frowned.

"How do you know?" Kekko pointed out his informant, and McLean demanded why he had not spoken about it. The man said that he was too busy to bother over a Fiji lad.

"Too plenty cheeky, that boy," he said. "No good he stop."

McLean would not have picked him up, he reflected, but he gave the wheel to Kiyuku and went below, still frowning. He hoped the boy would stay in hiding. He was not quite sure how much the lad might have picked up in his cabin duties. He might know their destination.

"We'll get there first, anyway," he thought. "I can send the schooner on to Makira Bay with Kiyuku and hide her in the creek. The salt-water men are friendly there and they won't be liable to find her. We can signal her when we want her. It puts another kink in things but there's no use worrying about it now."

BUDD sat on a chair at the cabin table, McLean and Connolly facing him.

"You're in the hands of your friends, Jim," said Connolly. "There's no sense in putting your head in the mouth of the British lion unless you're in shape to twist his tail. I'm Irish, and I know. You didn't do it, of course, but you'll have a —— of a time proving it.

"You told the skipper of that launch that you fought Parker, and where. A lawyer might say that shows your innocence, which it does, but the prosecution won't look at it that way.

"You show up all bloody. They find Parker on the beach with a hole in the back of his skull and a bloodstained club close by him. He's dead. Found within twenty minutes of the time you left him by a canoe load of natives coming back from a jamboree. Doctor says he's been dead just a short time. You had a grievance against him, you called him out of that groggery. You beat him up, admittedly, and you got out of Suva on a night boat. The skipper of the launch gave you away. Heard about the murder as soon as he got back and told all he knew. Afraid he might be hauled into it probably. We haven't got any money. They'd railroad you. It was probably the chap you thought you saw skulking in the pandanus and, by this time, he may have sworn he saw you do it to save his own neck.

"You didn't do it, and by the time you get back you'll have money. The whole thing may clear up. Bound to. Murder will out. Whoever did it, cleaned him. Turned his pockets inside out and took his watch. They'll assume you did that to make it look like robbery. But the chap may give himself away."

"I don't like running away," said Budd. "It's a presumption of guilt."

"What do you care about presumption of guilt when you're not guilty?"

"If they overhaul us, they'll bring you into it. Take the schooner. I appreciate what you've done, but I've put you in the hole. You'd better put about and take me back to face the music."

"You're talkin' rank mutiny," said McLean. "Also —— nonsense. It was a choice of being wi' your friends who ken you cudna ha' done such a thing or bein' i' Suva jail i' the shadow o' the gallows. Much guid it does a man to be found innocent after he's deid. The only way ye'll get back is by swimmin' fifty miles o' shark-infested water. We're well awa', an' they'll no be overhaulin' us. They'll no be findin' you in the bush on Bauro. We'll find a way to see how the land lies later an' meantime I can stow ye where they'll never find you, until we establish your innocence. Come on deck, mon. Let the winds blaw the cobwebs oot o' your heid. As for facin' the music, I'll furnish that."

Connolly went up with Budd, still moody. It was close to sunset. They were well north of the reefs of the Yasawa group, the islets standing up like enormous fern baskets, gilded by the level rays. The big islands swam in a purple haze.

As they stood at the rail McLean came on deck. His pipes were tucked beneath his arm, the droners sounding. They turned to see him pacing back and forth, his fingers busy as the chanter shrilled and swelled into a wild air, the ribbons streaming in the wind. The fierce strains got into Budd's blood as Gavin McLean had meant them to. If he was letting loose his familiar spirits, they were benignant ones. They drove the bleak thoughts out of Budd's brain, they roused him to the quality of his two staunch friends. His head was up when the tune stopped and the droning died away.

"That's a fightin' tune," said McLean. "There's naught like the pibroch to hearten a man in exile."

"Did you say it was a tune?" asked Connolly.

"'Twas a grand tune. 'There Were Twenty Pipers in A, in A' is the name of it. Heather music."

"'Twould sound better on the Irish pipes," said Connolly. "They're sweeter."

McLean gasped, his gills grew as red as those of a bellicose Tom turkey; as red as his hair. The ancient feud was on.

"The Irish pipes are but a feeble imitation," he said. "The true pibroch cam' fra Greece when the Tuatha De Danann, the tribes of the god Danu, left there on account o' the Syrians and went to Scandinavia. They settled in Scotland, content at last, under Nuadu Airgetlaim, bringin' wi' them the sacred stane o' Scone on which a' the kings o' bonny Scotland ha' been crowned, wi' the pipers to gie' them honor."

"I've heard of that stone of destiny," said Connolly. "'Tis called the Lia Fail and 'twas set up at Tara by the same Nuadu who passed on through Scotland to Ireland in search of a better place and finding it. But 'twas Nemed the Scythian who came to Ireland with his nine hundred fighting men long before Nuadu who brought the pipes. As he brought along the plaids and the tartans. Nemed, the first of the Milesians. 'Twas a piper that Conn Cetchathach, King of Tara, dismissed from his court for being always out of tune that took his pipes with him to Scotland and set the fashion there. Sure that's the difference between the Scotch and Irish pipes today. Also the Irish, becoming more quickly civilized, took to breeches, whereas the Scots, being proud of their hairy legs, wear kilts whenever they get the chance."

The war was on. McLean had purposely provoked it, and Budd fancied that Connolly saw through the artifice to wean him from his own troubles. The controversy raged hot and long, discussing the merits and demerits of Highland *piob-mala* and Celtic *cuislin*, of chaunters with and without bells, of long and short drones, of union-pipes, of blow-pipe inflation or bellows. Before it was over Connolly had introduced a mythical history of early Ireland and its customs that left Budd weak with laughter and, at the end, he took the pipes and produced from them a plaintive tune, after shifting the sliding joints to exact harmony with the chaunter. It was a real melody, though McLean vowed that it lacked vigor.

"Is that an Irish tune?" he asked.

"'Twas played at the funeral of an ancestor of mine," said Connolly with a wink at Budd. "He was the first Brehon of Meath and the air was thought of so highly that they set it down in the Brehon books. I'm thinking that your Highland music has lacked a literature which alone proves my contentions. The piper had been in the family since the days of Miled, I'm told."

McLean snorted and returned the proper dissonance to his pipes. He strode before them, skreeling "Cock o' the North."

"Match that, if you can, wi' your Irish plaints," he said.

"I'll give in," declared Connolly. "There's nothing to rival that in air, on land or the waters beneath the earth. And I'll grant you one more thing, McLean."

"What's that?"

"In the absence of the true *potheen*, Scotch whisky makes an admirable substitute. You may lack the finer secrets of the still, but the effect is much the same. As Roderick O'Connor, last of the native kings of Ireland once remarked when he wished to reward his favorite piper, 'A wet whistle lasts the longest.' Let's drown the argument in Glenlivet, Jim, assisting at the obsequies."

CHAPTER V

NGATI THE WIZARD

IT WAS dark inside the great *hamal*, the village clubhouse of Niku the Chief, but their eyes were becoming used to the dusk, and slowly the objects about them came out of the gloom. The enormous building, sacred to men, and men alone, was a combination of lodge, temple and club. There weird rituals were carried out, initiations into secret orders and the ceremonials of admission to manhood completed. It was the refuge of the married men, tired of their own households, the rooming-house of the bachelors. Every warrior had his own stall woven off from a center aisle. The unmarried bucks used theirs also for sleeping. In them were stowed their weapons, the personal belongings.

Budd counted a hundred and fifty of these cubicles on either side of the aisle down which they walked to where the sacred fire burned perpetually on a flat stone at the end, where stood the shrine of their totem images. That made close to three hundred warriors, and it seemed that fully that many were hunkered down, close as minnows in a shoal, sitting silently on the bare floor, giving out the strong odor of human exudation and palm oil that was none too fresh. When they moved the smell of them was like the passing of a wave. They were little more than shapeless masses of men, with their eyeballs showing as they shifted or their teeth, filed to points, catching the light of the fire. Silent and savage and stupid, staring at the white men who had come so boldly to the village and, marching straight to the *hamal*—as was indeed the necessary custom for all strangers who did not want to be immediately treated as foes—had asked for an audience with Niku and Ngati.

That had been in the early afternoon. Outside the bright sun still blazed high in the heavens, but within all was darkness, stillness, mystery. The only entrance was over a palisade of horizontal logs as high as a man, as high as these short men of Melanesia, sooty-brown, semihuman; then through a square opening that looked abominably like the entrance to a trap. Above the logs', close matting rose to the high-pitched roof. The mats could be lifted, but now they were tight-closed against light and air.

There were other smells besides that of man and wood smoke, smells musty and suggestive of the charnel house. Along the walls stood strange mummies between racks stacked close as a grocer's shelves with skulls, row upon row, thousands of them in all stages of preservation. On the posts and beams, tied with sinnet, as far as the eyes could pierce the shadows beneath the roof, showed vague figures and bundles wrapped in bark cloth, bones of warriors, dried crocodiles, mummies displaced by newer or greater celebrities. A beastly dust seemed to drip down from them through the slowly moving smoke of the fire. Lower yet there were killing mallets, adzes, drumsticks, all carved into nightmare visions of faces that leered and sneered dimly in the dusk as the fire shifted.

When they had first arrived there had been but a dozen men inside besides Niku. Ngati had come in through a side door tabued to commoners. These scores had come drifting in noiselessly, lifting the mat over the traplike entrance, coming silently down the aisle to squat beside their fellows. The quiet was sinister, but none of the three white men felt afraid. They had got that far, they had won an audience, they were to be allowed to state their reason for adventuring up into the bush. Their daring carried a suggestion of mighty *mana*. White men were not fools; they would not walk so confidently if they were not well guarded. A Melanesian will bully but he knows nothing of bluff. These whites must be wizards.

One of them was surely a wizard. Ngati had heard of Tataneliuaitu—The Man Who is Familiar with Devils—he who carried a bag of imprisoned spirits beneath his arm and made them tell him secrets.

So these three men had marched up from the sea, sending even their ship away, Tataneliuaitu in the lead with his bag, making the squealing devils warn him of all the dangers in the road. They had come alone. They seemed to carry no weapons. The two others each carried a pack that might hold other devils; probably did. It would be a terrible thing if these devils were let loose in the village. It was best to treat the white men fairly and get them to take them away with them.

Big men, two hands taller than the tallest tribesman, were the two that followed Tataneliuaitu along the trails; strong and straight, without doubt, great warriors. As for Tataneliuaitu, he had hair compared to which the orange-hued mops—lime-bleached—of the tribesmen were dull indeed. He had hair as red as fire. He was not so tall as the others, but he was very strong, as he must be to control a bag full of devils.

They were not traders. Wizards. What did they want? Tataneliuaitu had brought his spirit bag into the *hamal* with him. Ngati did not like that as he sat behind the fire, stark naked, smeared in a harlequin pattern of white and yellow, red and black. He did not even wear a charm, but on the chests of all the tribesmen there gleamed gently, as the fire glinted on them, *doblons* of Phillip the Second, King of Spain. Some had only one, but most had four or five, pierced, strung together like sequins. Several had full necklaces and Niku the Chief must have had fifty of them in one long chain that fell down on his fat, naked belly.

The three white men did not break the silence. To make Niku or Ngati speak first was to win the first move. Their general plan was made up, talked over on the voyage, based upon McLean's intimate knowledge of the beliefs and practises of the Solomon Islanders. On this they risked not merely their lives but their success in gathering the harvest of coins. Psychology was greater than gunpowder as the pen is mightier than the sword. A slip meant their skulls added to the racks, their flesh cooked in the pits. But the hazard was the sauce of their adventure.

Mana, or supernatural power, belonging to the unseen, rules all things in Melanesia. It effects things beyond the ordinary power of man and outside the common processes of life. All supernatural beings have it, most ghosts and some men. *Mana* may be conveyed to a successful warrior in the amulet of a stone about his neck, a tuft of leaves in his belt, a tooth hung on the finger of his spear-hand or in the form of words by which he invokes supernatural assistance.

His conquering is not the result of his own powers or individual skill. So *mana* may dwell in inanimate objects, in curiously shaped stones that may be planted in the garden to ensure a good crop. Some stones have been sacred to certain individual ghosts from times immemorial.

When a man possessed of *mana* dies, it will after his death abide in his ghost with increased vigor, more ease of movement, greater power of malevolence. Thus the ghost must be propitiated.

The conspicuous success of a man is caused by his *mana*. The greater the success the greater his *mana* is presumed to be. His influence depends upon the impression of his fellows that he has it. The tribesmen believed that Niku had it and Ngati also. And Ngati and Niku were convinced that the three whites possessed *mana* superior to theirs.

As to the ghost bag, ghosts and supernatural spirits which have never been human, are held in tremendous respect in the Melanesian Islands. Shrines are erected to their memories and the great images that missionaries have incorrectly considered idols. To make the proper offering to a ghost ensures the protection of its powers. To fight a man under the protection of a more powerful ghost means not only risk of losing but of being at the mercy of the latter ghost after death. A villager will not trespass upon a place where one of his tribe has killed a man of another village for fear of being attacked by the ghost of the murdered man.

Magic and sorcery are accomplished entirely by ghosts and spirits, the wizards being the mediums. Sickness, accident, unhappiness, death, all come from malignant *mana*, offset only by the favor of greater or higher quality *mana*, exercised by spirit, ghost, wizard or chief.

The tribesmen believed the white man's *mana* of the highest type, proved by the wonders he worked that they could not.

Given that, and the fact that a coin might well contain *mana*, might be an acceptable offering to malicious ghosts; and McLean's tale was not hard to conceive, to make convincing.

NOW and then the fire would glow in angry flame. It was of charcoa, set in a bowl-shaped cavity which communicated withl a bellows covertly worked by Ngati, an effect known as the ghost's breath.

As this happened Connolly nudged Budd, sitting cross-legged next to him. He saw Connolly looking upward and followed his glance. It seemed as if a trophy of armor was hanging there from a cross beam. Helmet and corselet and sword, surely, with the suggestion of other weapons. These above a carved wooden bonito fish, conventionalised somewhat, but beautifully done and polished until the wood shone like burnished metal.

Did the armor date back to the storm-flung galleon, to the looting of the wreck, the killing of the survivors? Did the mummied effigies around the walls have among their ranks any of the unfortunate Spaniards? And what did the bonito signify? Budd strove with a vague recollection that such caskets were used for specially honored trophies, a dried head or highly prized skull. Did it hold a grisly relic of the Don Commander of the ship that had foundered in a jungle sea?

Nervousness was generating there among the tribesmen in the darkness. The fear of the unknown. The sweat came out on them like dew. It would not do to carry it too far.

McLean softly cleared his throat. Instantly there appeared up in the high roof three little spots of light—three ghosts—flitting here and there with incredible rapidity, leaping among the mummies and the weapons, darting with devilish precision from place to place, mingling now and then as if in conference, then leaping far away, seeking hidden corners. The tribesmen gulped. Ngati shifted uneasily and Niku broke the silence.

Apparently the white men had made no movement. They sat cross-legged, their hands folded in their laps, their packs and the ghost bag of Tataneliuaitu between their thighs. It was simple in the dim light to manipulate three high-batteried torches, each hooded with a cap that let through only a narrow, tiny slit of light.

The program had commenced.

"Why do the white men come here?" asked Niku.

Silence again. Budd had put a small music box under the hollow of his knee when he first sat. He set off the spring and the tinkling tune played itself out. The breathing of the warriors was like the soughing of wind in tree tops. This time it was certain that none of the white men had moved. Therefore this was the voice of a ghost.

"For this reason have we come," answered McLean. "Long ago, when the greatest of your *nivuku*, banyan, trees was no higher than the knee of a man, there came to this place a great ship bearing white men. The wind gods were angry with them because they had not sacrificed to them and so the wind gods made issue with the gods of the water and the ship was thrown high upon the land.

"Because also of their not having made sacrifice, their *mana* became weak and they were killed by the men who then lived here, who were the fathers of the fathers of your fathers, O Niku and Ngati.

"Now they carried with them the yellow stones with which they should have sacrificed to the gods of the wind and, when the ship was wrecked and they were killed, these stones which were *netik*, magic, stones were also taken by your people.

"And the heads of the chiefs of these white men were brought up to the *hamal* which stood where this *hamal* now stands. For the warriors were proud of overcoming the *mana* of the white men. And they ate the heart and liver of the white chief, they ate his eyes and his tongue and all took a part of him that his *mana* might enter into them.

"But the ghosts of those white men wander in the uttermost darkness nor may they be released because of the anger of the wind gods that will not be appeased until the sacrifice is made to them of the *netik* yellow stones that they love.

"These gods are powerful gods yet have I put a spell upon them. I hold them in this bag and there is a charm upon them that will not let them loose, though they groan and pray and beg me to do so. They tell me secrets that I may do this thing. But they are stubborn and they will not promise to release the ghosts of the white men until I give them the *netik* stones."

He squeezed the bag, the valves opened and the drones emitted fearful sounds. He gave one or two trills on the chaunter and let the dread noises die away. The audience shuddered as one man. There were no exceptions. Not even Ngati or Niku.

"Now I have forced these gods, by torment, to tell me where these *netik* stones were held. It was long before they would say exactly. But now I know and for this have I come to your village, Niku, that I may secure the stones, making you gifts that shall carry the white man's *mana* to take their place. I would take the head of the white chief and of his followers, with their weapons, and then their ghosts will be free and their *mana* shall protect you and make your tribe strong.

"This is a ghostly matter, and it must be dealt with by wizards. Therefore I, Tataneliuaitu, wish to talk with Ngati the Wizard in this affair. Ngati, whose fame goes out far. And I will abide with his counsel in the matter."

The tale was simple enough for them to understand. It followed the line of their beliefs, it flattered Ngati, it promised protection and gifts. It was well conceived. And now the issue hung indeed upon the knees of heathen gods.

Ngati blew his fire and rose back of it before the blaze died down. The story was good, it might well be true. He was already disposed to grant it—all except letting go the heads. There were only two of these. They had been embalmed, and one was in the bonito box, one in a special rack.

There was no mistaking them, shriveled though they were, for white men's heads. Their presence made the tribe strong. It would take a good deal to offset their loss. But he did not like the noise, that he did not recognize as music, from the box he did not see, he did not like the groans that came from the bag, and he liked least of all the three dancing lights in the roof. One could hide nothing from those three jigging *aitus*. They must be the projected ghosts of the three visitors.

But he had to maintain his face. He had purposely worn no charms so that hostile influences might not be able to enter them, driving out the friendly *mana*. But he was impressive enough, lean as a skeleton, vivid in his painted nakedness, his face like a skull in its white and black pigment. There was a doubt in his mind. Tantaneliuaitu had passed along the coast not long since, at the time that the man from Tipye killed the warrior who had sought his wife. That warrior had lost both his head and the yellow *netik* stone. Perhaps Tataneliuaitu had got hold of it somehow. No doubt he wanted the stones, but how about all this talk of ghosts? Was that just a good lie? Why should these three bother themselves about the ghosts of white men who had passed when the big banyans were seedlings? If it was all a made up tale, the tribe would keep the stones, worn because they should hold the *mana* of those wrecked white men, though it was true that the *mana* might be weak by this time.

"HOW do we know that you tell the truth?" he asked. "What are these old ghosts to you?"

He was not a fool, Ngati. And the whole thing might have shriveled there and then if it had not been for the fact of Connolly's private heirloom *doblon*, and the fact that it was not pierced, as all those worn by the tribesmen were. To have shown Kurili's coin in the same connection would have been fatal. But Connolly's, better preserved than theirs yet clearly one and the same, without the stringing hole.

"These are the ghosts of kinsmen," said McLean, stretching the truth a trifle in a good cause. "This man," he pointed to Connolly, "has with him one of these *netik* stones that was left behind. That's true anyway," he told his Scotch conscience. "But one is of no use. Yet we bring it as proof that the tale is true. Is it not so?"

Connolly answered in Melanesian.. McLean provoked the drones again and, as Connolly passed him his *doblon*, he placed it in the eager palm of Ngati whose suspicions grew to a sudden head, then wilted as he saw that it was different from the stones possessed by the tribe.

McLean had risen and flung on the wizard's palm the strong ray of his torch. Connolly and Budd followed suit and the gold disc showed dazzling. Immediately McLean pressed the windbag and let his weirdest lament peal out. It was the voice of ghosts, without doubt. And these lights that came from no fire, that played now on the forms of Ngati and Niku, that swept the hypnotized squatting groups, were mighty magic. If these men had come to claim the *netik* stones, let them have them and depart before the gods in the bag got loose, for, by the sounds, they must be fearful and powerful ones.

"Let us show our gifts," said McLean. "Save those that I bring for thee Ngati," he added in a low voice, "and for thee, O Niku."

Budd and Connolly opened their packs and showed their samples—under the rays that enhanced their beauty. There were certain things, there were stamped, bossed ends for curtain poles, wondrous articles that far surpassed the plain discs. There were buttons of imitation jet and cut steel, round mirrors and a great assortment of Christmas tree tinsel and decorations. The display, to a white man, would have looked like a childish raid upon a ten cent store. To the tribesmen they were being shown the treasures of Aladdin's garden. Their grunts gave approval as they crowded round until the deep voice of Niku ordered them back and he took the samples into his own custody.

"There be plenty of these things," said McLean. "In exchange for the yellow *netik* stones I will give them, three for one."

Niku, bolstered by the sight and touch of tribute, spoke again.

"We will talk of these things later. There shall be a feast and a dance, and on the third day Ngati will give you the answer."

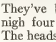
"They are as good as ours," said McLean, "if we survive indigestion from the feast. It's up to Ngati, of course. I'll fix him up with a torch, some trick matches and a humming top. I've had a lot of success with the tops and native wizards. Their *juju* is inside, you see, and whichever way the top falls finally, they fake to suit their purpose. Same way with a compass. They put the man or woman they want to make a victim due north and set the compass on a *netik* stone. Naturally it swings to the chosen party.

"The torch is very great *mana*, and I shall warn him that it will gradually lose power as we get farther away because a white man's *mana* alone can live in the tube. I'll let him try the fake matches, using ones myself that I've palmed until he's sure only the white man's *mana* can work them. Then I'll give him a few good boxes that I'll claim I've fixed up for him especially. First of all I'll make sure he don't know a match when he sees one. You never can tell these days what even a bushman wizard may know about.

"The sticking point is those heads. Our yarn would fall if we went away and left them behind. That's one reason why they rack up the skulls. A ghost isn't much good without his head. That's the basis of head hunting. Ngati hates to give 'em up. They've been the boast o' the tribe for nigh four hundred years, don't forget that. The heads of white men."

"How do you know they've got them?" asked Budd.

"Saw one of them in a rack. The other's in that carved bonito box under the armor. That's what they're made for. And there may be something else in that casket as well. We've got to get it. But it won't be easy."



THEY endured the feast with prowling dogs and clouds of flies, with Niku too hospitably thrusting greasy gobbets of pork and turtle fat into their mouths. They sat up all night to watch a monotonous exhibition of shuffling dancing to the beat of log-drums on the *sing-sing* ground; a performance heightened when Ngati came out in a jingling coat of golden mail and gave a solo dance in which his shadow played victim and he the swooping pursuer. McLean contributed, improvising on the pipes a medley that Connolly declared was the final touch to a hideous nightmare.

The drum beating, the so-called dancing and the howling monotony of the savage chants kept up until nearly dawn. It was not until noon that Ngati appeared and gave McLean his interview. The three white men and the wizard went to the latter's den, a foul-smelling spot in a lava blowout that was reached through the intricacies of a great sacred banyan. The place was filled with odds and ends, skulls of dogs, pigs, crocodiles and children, twisted boughs of trees that had been carved into suggestions of writhing snakes, peculiar shaped stones and many mysterious bundles swathed in bark-cloth, calabashes filled with evil concoctions; bundles of herbs, the regular paraphernalia of a wizard's cave. It was lit from the top by a natural fissure through which the sunlight poured down in a shaft, under which Ngati seated himself. Seen in this illumination, he showed greater age. His skin, from which he had removed the paint of his overnight trappings, was scaley as a lizard, woven with a multitude of fine lines on his face, and they could see that his mop of hair was a wig, a device often used in the islands.

Ngati wore a loincloth and was hung with necklaces of bones strung through the marrow canals, with teeth of shark and dog and man and with the withered claws of birds. His eyes were red with *yangona* brew, and he had wiped off his make-up with some sort of rancid grease that, together with the fact that he and water were evidently deadly enemies, did not make him a too agreeable host.

It was clear from the start that he was not in a good humor and he merely grunted when Connolly and Budd again presented their samples. He evinced but slight interest in McLean's suggestion of a basis of exchange for the coins brightening only when the Scot produced a flask and, taking off the metal cup that covered the lower half, poured himself a small drink of whiskey, drank it to show there was no harm to it, and handed it to Ngati.

A wondrous change came over the elderly wizard's features as he sniffed, tasted, swallowed and the spirits warmed his ancient stomach. He reached out for the flask, set it to his mouth and gurgled it empty, handing it back with an "*Eyah!*" of satisfaction and a grin at the look of chagrin on Connolly's face.

McLean produced pipe and tobacco and lit it from a fresh box of matches. The wizard reached behind him and brought a section of bamboo forth, asking for the tobacco. He stuffed a cavity below a node partition that had been pierced with a small hole, plugged it with a wooden disc that had a slit in it and set his mouth to the other end of the bamboo, sucking at it until the central section was filled with smoke. This he inhaled with closed eyes, replacing the bottom plug with a solid one and corking the top of the tube between his long draws. McLean gave him a lighted match for the occasion and again he reached out his predatory claw for the whole box.

McLean had substituted the trick matches and the wizard flung them to the ground in annoyance as they fizzed and refused to flame. McLean took the box, using a palmed match which ignited readily.

"Your *mana* is not strong enough," he said. "I will lend you mine." He put the box into a small cabinet and closed it, breathing upon it and turning it, opening it again and showing what seemed to be the same box. Now the matches lit, and Ngati was pleased as a child.

With the impressive mien of a conjurer, McLean went on with his exhibition of parlor magic. It was not the first time he had played the rôle with savage witch-doctors, and he used simple tricks that were calculated to make Ngati desire them immensely, since all could be used in his divination rituals.

First came a black ball of wood threaded on a length of rope. It slid readily up and down the cord and he let Ngati manipulate it. Then he held it vertically, his foot on one end, raised the ball to his hand and let it glide down. Next he raised the ball and this time it stayed half way up the rope as he gave a sharp word of command. Again it slid towards the ground and again at his word it stopped. Mystified, the wizard essayed the trick but could not accomplish it. McLean took it over and told him to give the word and the mysterious globe obeyed, suspended against gravity. Once more Ngati tried and failed, giving it back with a grunt. McLean put it aside and asked for a clean calabash.

Ngati emptied one out and McLean dusted it clean with a bandanna. He took some soft dust from the bottom of the cave and made a little pile of it in the bottom of the bowl, handing it to Ngati.

"Is it dry?" he asked and when the wizard nodded, asked him if he could turn it into mud without water. Ngati grunted again in negation and McLean covered the calabash with the bandanna, again breathing on it and muttering a charm. Removing the cloth he stirred the dry dust with an empty dry spoon, inspected the dust and offered the spoon to Ngati who scooped up some of the dirt and let it fall again, wonderingly.

The spoon back in his hand, McLean repeated the process and beat the dust into mud, then into batter, handing spoon and calabash to the wizard who, bewildered, shook his head and inspected the mess with his forefinger.

The humming top was next on the repertoire, and as the bright toy whirred when the string was withdrawn and it was placed on hard dirt, it gave out whistling notes through the apertures in its sides while Ngati's eyes lost their dullness. He could make nothing of it when he took it up, gingerly enough, as if he feared the devil that must be inside. McLean did not repeat the spinning, but laid the top aside with the rope and ball and the dirtied spoon.

Now he showed him an electric torch and flashed it about the cave, shutting it off and letting it shine again. Ngati sat in a trance of amazement, mingled with fear and desire. He was persuaded to take the torch at last, but could do nothing with it. McLean slipped the spring catch, set it so that the connection stayed and gave it back to him, a bewildering magic wand that the wizard waved as a child might. But when McLean darkened the tube, Ngati could not rekindle it and showed his chagrin.

McLean put it away, Ngati's eyes following it, passing wistfully to the top, the black ball, the spoon and the mud in the calabash. There had been the chance of his hand accidently moving the trigger of the torch but McLean was ready for that contingency and the timid way in which the other handled it made the risk slight.

Once more they took up the bargaining and finally McLean assembled his apparatus, added the torch and two boxes of good matches, on which he was careful to breathe.

"These gifts also will I give you," he said. "This," and he raised the torch, "I will fill with my *mana*, but you must use it seldom for, as I journey, its power will slowly depart nor can it be filled again but by me. But these others I will show you how to use and the name of Ngati will be as the voice of your biggest drum, sounding through all the land."

Ngati got up and brought over a cylinder made from a hollowed tree with handles carved from the natural wood, a native water pail that would hold several gallons, He carried it with difficulty and set it down, taking off its wooden cover. It was filled with the coins.

"It is a trade, white wizard," he said. "Now show me how to do your magic."

His face soured when McLean asked for the heads, and the bonito casket. He shook his head stubbornly, weakening as McLean began to gather up his things.

But he would not promise.

THEY left him sitting in the dusk, the sun ray shifted. He looked like a weatherworn old idol as they went outside with their packs.

"Why didn't you try him with the bagpipes?" asked Connolly. "Threaten to let the ghosts loose on him. Coaxing wasn't any good. You can't blarney him."

"He wanted those tricks, and he was sweating to own the lamp. It broke his heart to take away those matches. I think another flask of Glenlivet might have won him over," said Budd.

"No," said McLean. "There's something in the wind. I don't know what it is. He has got the coins ready for a swap, but I believe he's really afraid to turn over the heads. They mean too much to the tribe as trophies. We'll have to wait. I told Kuriki I'd signal him from the top of that old crater in the middle of the grass plateau we came through. You can see it from where he is. Said I'd set off a smoke bomb. He would reach the landing about the same time that we would. It's got to be daylight of course. Once we start, we don't want any delay."

"Have we got to stay up here another night?" Connolly asked. "If so I vote we eat alone."

"If we can. We'll have to stay in the clubhouse overnight."

"Phew! I've got a fairly strong stomach," said Budd, "but that place is the limit."

Ngati did not reappear, nor Niku. They wandered round the village unmolested, the snarling dogs sneaking from them, pigs everywhere, flies and filth.

They noticed that the men they saw were minus their coins. Ngati's collection had been thorough. The women went out to their gardens and the men disappeared after them, to sleep through the hot afternoon in little arbors or stretched on the broad limbs of shady trees. The three white men found a comparatively clean and cool nook under some vines by the stream that was the only pleasant thing in the place, and smoked. There was nothing else to do.

The sun sank behind the mountains and the women came back with bundles of yams and plantains, some with babies slung in hammock-like nets from their necks. The men strolled in, fires were lit, young bucks strutted before the girls and a messenger came to bid them to a meal in the *hamal* with Niku. Now there were torches inside, and the fire burned brighter. Ngati was not to be seen, the bonito cabinet was still in place and above it the morion, corselet, sword and dagger of the galleon's captain. McLean told them where to look for the other head and they saw it in a niche, smoke-dried to leather with a long wisp of mustachios, a pointed beard and hair that hung below the severed neck.

It was a grim night in the reeking place after the torches went out and the fire died down. None of them felt like sleep. McLean was grave and Budd and Connolly talked in whispers.

"I smell another mouse," said Dennis. "Not a gold one this time. I'll be glad when we get out of this. I vote we call it a deal as it lies."

"They'd be more likely to think us easy to do in on the way back," said Budd. "I wonder what Ngati is up to? And listen to those brutes snore. You could shovel this air. Their ideas of decency and sanitation are a bit thick."

The mats were open to the night, but there was little breeze coming in. But at last they saw gray dawn creeping through, then brighter light and heard a tremendous chattering of parrots. Suddenly there was the hollow boom of a great drum outside, another and another until the air throbbed with the rhythm. The sleepers sprang up and rushed from the *hamal*, carrying their weapons, ignoring the white men. Niku sprang past them, a great club in his hand.

"It's a raid," said McLean. "Better get out and lend a hand." They carried automatics and extra clips but they had been careful not to show them, reserving them for the emergency that seemed to have arrived.

Ngati met them as they crawled through the opening. The wizard greeted them with an affable grin. To their surprize they saw many of the warriors coming slowly back toward the *hamal*, while others were missing and a few were just disappearing through the stockade gate. There was no sign of an attack. The drums had ceased. The *boo* of a conch sounded downhill, then another, and then silence except the cooing of doves and the shrieking of the parrots to the sun, now clear of the forest tops, hemming in the village with green, softly waving cliffs of verdure.

"Soon I will give you your answer, Tatauliuaitu," said Ngati. "Shall we eat?"

Breakfast was not a notable meal with the tribe, and they were glad to eat fresh fruit after the greasy stuff of the night before. Once they thought they heard faint shouting and speculated on it, deciding that the raid was an offensive one.

A runner came in and entered the *hamal*. He was plainly excited. In a little while Niku emerged and spoke aside with Ngati. Young boys ran to the houses and a file of women gathered and, with baskets woven from green palm leaves, swung from poles, chanting an eerie song, went through the gateway.

"They've won," said McLean. "That was the *bakolo* song. The baskets are for heads and flesh—long-pig. It's none of our business, but I wish Ngati would make up his mind. I don't want to be here when that crowd comes back. They're starting to dig pits over there."

"They don't seem to be for us, that's one consolation," said Budd. "Ugh! I've no desire to sit in at a cannibal *kai-kai*. Imagine Niku insisting on feeding you titbits."

"For a man who roared about a weak stomach last night, you're not so squeamish what you talk about," said Connolly. "Hullo, here comes Ngati. He's got that casket. Two of 'em. Niku's got the other. We win."

"For which the Lord be thankit," quoted McLean devoutly enough. "We may not be out o' the wood, but we can see through the trees."

"Here are the heads," said the wizard. "The weapons will be brought. Now show me the tricks, white wizard, and take your *netik* stones."

It did not take McLean long to show how to spin the top, to explain that the black ball, owing to the hole through which the rope passed being slightly angled, would run freely when the line was slack, stop instantly when it was tautened; to demonstrate the filling of the spoon with water through a hole at the bottom of its hollow handle where it joined the bowl, held back by pressure of the air when a little plug of wax was inserted in another hole at the top of the handle; to reveal the working of the torch trigger.

NGATI opened two curving doors in the rounded side of the bonito cabinets and showed the two dried heads. He gave them the armor and then he fell to winding the top and making it spin, throwing on it the light of the torch. He was like a child with too many Christmas presents, too busy to answer their farewell.

Niku had been made extravagantly happy by the present of an alarm clock.

It was impossible to explain the alarm working to him but they explained the winding and left him delighted with the ticking which he was sure belonged to the white devil-devil inside. It would give him great *mana*. Also they gave him a little globe of porcelain treated on the inside with radium paint, originally designed for a finder to the drop chain of an electric fixture. He took both into the *hamal* with him, the better to demonstrate the shining finder.

"Just like a kid with a new agate marble," said Budd.

They estimated that there were a thousand of the coins, though they did not actually count them as they made *rouleaux* with strips of bark cloth and divided the load. Over five thousand dollars apiece. Connolly set the unvisored morion on his head and used the sword for a cane while Budd took the dagger and thrust it into his belt. McLean refused the corselet. It was small for any of them and it was in bad condition, a nuisance to carry. They decided to take it beyond the village and leave it in the bush.

The sword was not very badly rusted. And its steel was in good temper, thanks to the skill of its maker. So with the dagger, long and serviceable. Connolly hooked the long blade almost to the hilt.

"No pot metal went into the forging of this," he said, and made a pass or two with it. With the morion on his head, the sword in hand he looked a good deal like his remote ancestor, the Spanish Don who had swum ashore from the Armada galleon off Carnsore Head three hundred and fifty odd years ago, Budd fancied.

They breathed more freely when they were clear of the stockade and marching down a bush trail, but McLean was still a little anxious.

"Ngati changed front too quickly to suit me," he said. "I dinna see what he has i' mind unless he's told the raiding party to ambush us. But that 'ud take a chance we might win through and he'd lose the heids after a'. But it's astounding he'd let them leave the *hamal* at all unless he was sure of getting them back or others in their place that were equally valuable."

"We should have made Ngati come with us for safe conduct," suggested Budd. "If we meet those other chaps they may not understand our arrangement with Ngati. Good idea to cover up these bonito boxes, isn't it?"

"The old fox may think he has a joker in his deck," said Connolly, "but our automatics should turn out trumps."

"Fine, as long as the trumps hold out," said McLean. "But there's no use bothering. Ngati may have decided to put a good face on it after all when we held out. He surely wanted those things. I'm wonderin' how many o' them he'll distribute and how he got them to give up the coins. No' that I'm carin', but I like to know how his mind works. Comes in usefu' when you're dealin' wi' 'em."

They made swift time, though the sweat broke out on them in patches after the first mile and soon soaked their drill clothing through. McLean had his pipes as well as his bundle of gold, but he would not let either of them help him. Connolly suggested once in jest that he pipe them on, but Gavin refused.

"I need a' my wind," he said. "I'm no wasting it on unregenerates who dinna ken when an instrument's in tune or no. No that Budd's so bad but I'm not spilling harmony on Connolly."

Dennis winked at Jim. He had explained to him that the nine notes of the chaunter did not form any known diatonic scale and that C and F were actually off pitch with the rest. That it was easy to irritate any Highland piper by pretending that they did not know a true scale when they heard one, and that the Irish pipe was truly attuned.

"There's small difference between them," said Connolly, "both sound at times like a pig trying to sing. But Gavin's a bonny piper. I only know one or two trick tunes. It's the one thing he's conceited about, and it's fun to string him. Not that I'd hurt his feelings any more than he would mine when he plays."

Occasionally they glimpsed the sea and rejoiced. It was clean and open. None of them were easily upset, but the thought of the grim feast for which preparations were going on back in the village, the getting out of the wooden forks used only for man meat, the gathering of the red berries used to purge off the indigestion that otherwise followed the diet, the plucking of aromatic leaves in which the limbs would be wrapped before they were placed in the oven pits was not a pleasant one.

They came out of the forest at last upon the wide grassy plateau and made for the old crater in its center, clambering up its cindery sides eagerly to light the smoke bomb that would signal Kiyuku to bring the schooner out of its hiding place to the landing at the foot of the trail. It was impossible to see the latter until they broke out on the beach through the thick bush of belt that extended from the plateau to the shore, but they could see the bay where the *Mbelema* lay concealed in a mangrove creek from outside patrol, close to friendly salt water men.

A thick column of dense smoke rolled out of the bomb and spread before the wind plumed it off at a tangent. It could be seen for miles and it held a risk that could not be avoided—the possible attraction of the returning raiders. It was the custom of the women, McLean told them, to go down to the scene of a victorious raid and receive the heads in baskets that they set up on sticks and before which they danced, obscene figures with a *bakolo* chant that praised the killers and insulted the dead. And there was some fear in their minds, though neither mentioned it to another, that the raid might have had something to do with Kiyuku and the schooner, part of a plan of Ngati's to cut off the white men's retreat.

Therefore they strained their eyes toward the distant bay and let out unconscious sighs of relief when they saw an answering column of vapor and, not long afterward, the white fleck of the schooner as she came out of the mangrove belt and headed up the lagoon inside the barrier reef. Their bridges were not burned.

THE bomb died down and they lingered, finishing a pipe apiece in the shade of the jagged lip of the dead crater. Connolly got up first, tapping ashes from his bowl against his heel. Suddenly his figure stiffened.

"Those beggars are coming," he said. "Just entering the grass from the lower trail. They've seen the smoke. They're coming to investigate and they're coming on the run. They mean business."

There seemed small doubt of that. Through the stiff, coarse grass that grew waist high to the dwarfish natives, two score of black men came leaping, brandishing spears, each carrying a wicker shield. Their bodies, striped and smeared and spotted with paint, were curiously camouflaged, and they presented a weird appearance as they jumped high over the bunched grass, shaking their weapons, announcing their intentions by yells that sounded like the barking of dogs. They came on at a tremendous pace that never faltered. Warriors in front and the women in a following group, bearing their meat-baskets suspended from burden poles, two of them with spears on which were thrust objects that could not be mistaken, that grew in size as they advanced; freshly severed heads that soon would serve the motive for a wild dance about the drum logs with Ngati officiating as head devil.

It was evident that the tribesmen, drunk with blood-lust, whether they had intended to waylay the three whites or not, had every desire to add them to the day's bag. Their yells grew distinct and soon they could see the savage working of their features, the shine of their teeth in the wide opened mouths as the heads were flung back in the blood-howl.

"Wait till you see the whites of their eyes," said Connolly with a smile on his finely cut lips.

Budd glanced at him as the Celt stood there, lightly leaning on the sword he held in his left hand, his pistol in his right, the morion jauntily cocked on his head, handsome and debonnaire and as cool as if the shrieking, murderous horde that were at the foot of the crater's sharp pitch were friends he was inviting in to his own house for refreshments.

Gavin McLean's stocky figure was set with legs wide apart, his red poll uncovered, his face serious but unconcerned. The Celt and the Gael. Connolly's costume should have been completed with trunkhose, with leather boots and doublet; Gavin's with tartan plaid and kilt, claymore and targe.

For a moment he almost saw them thus. For a moment Time swung back and the centuries were joined up. It was a curious whimsy, brought on perhaps by the armor, the touch of his own hand on the dagger at his belt. They might need the old weapons when it came to close quarters. These frenzied apemen could not be demoralized by sight of death unless that death annihilated them or struck in some mysterious way.

Budd flung one glimpse, it might be the last, at the deep blue sea, the trade clouds on the horizon, the green and purple of the lagoon where the schooner was ruffling along to meet the men who stood on the slope of the dead crater—at bay. They had won through so far, but it was like to be the end.

Thoughts moved swiftly. McLean's eyes were lit like battle lanterns. Connolly's smile was one of cheery greeting. Budd thought of the murder charge still hanging over him, a subject mutually *tabued* after it had been agreed that he should be taken to an atoll known to McLean where he could be hidden until they found out how the land lay and made preparations to find the man who was guilty, to arrange for his defence. Now they had the funds for that.

"Don't all fire at once." Budd's thoughts vanished as the first of the tribesmen started up the slope, as spears began to come, falling short a little. He issued the order crisply. "We don't all want to have to reload at the same time."

"Right you are, Sergeant." Connolly brought up the Spanish blade in salute. "I'll get rid of mine first. By that time I can see if I've forgotten how to use a sword. Not much fencing here, though."

"I'll hold my fire," said McLean. "Until they come closer. We've got to break them. It's lucky the slope's a stiff one."

Under the rushing feet the cinders went sliding, and sulfurous dust of weathered ashes rose in clouds that made a background for the leaping figures that looked like fiends from the pit. They had smeared themselves with fresh blood from their victims, their mouths were sticky with it where they had bitten into raw and smoking livers.

Thirty at least in this front charge, howling as they came, legs and arms jerking back of the long shields round which their hideous faces peered in savage exultation and ferocity.

Connolly went a little way down the slope to meet them, firing deliberately. Budd, his right hand long since well, used his left forearm for a rest. The bullets bit through the wicker shields as if they had been paper. One man went down, whirling, sliding on the treacherous slope, clawing at the shifting cinders, disappearing behind the dust cloud through which new faces were appearing. Another followed him and another. Budd did not think that he wasted a shot. He was absolutely steady and he picked off his targets with the old precision with which he had helped to throw back a charge of the gray figures that once raced toward the front line trenches in the Argonne. At least a dozen warriors went sprawling, mortally hurt, their faces showing sudden consternation at the blows that reached out to them before they could reach their foes. But those untouched came on, unheeding. McLean's pistol began to bark. Budd started to reload, retreating a little dodging the spears that were coming more rarely now as the tribesmen closed in and kept their weapons for hand-to-hand encounter. Connolly called to him, tossing up his pistol.

"Use this, Jim. I'm trying out the sword."

IT SEEMED an age before he got the spare clip in. Then he filled up the second 'magazine. He saw a warrior twist in midair as McLean's shot went through his heart, he saw the sword of Dennis slick into a man's belly and come out again red and smoking. He saw the Irishman slit another's forearm as a man slits up a fish, and then he got his guns into the game again as Dennis fell back before the rush of three tribesmen, covered by their shields, viciously stabbing at him.

McLean's gun was empty. It was up to Budd for the moment, though Connolly was far from being defeated. Budd shot the nearest savage through the side of the head and he fell forward. Connolly grabbed his falling spear and used it to help ward off another. His blade went slithering out and the still keen edge severed the cords and flesh of a black wrist until it hung like a hinge from the arm. The third man was on him with a leap, thrusting his shield forward. The sword went through it to the hilt into the chest of the warrior, through the breast-bone and, as the man fell to his knees, his spear just grazing Connolly's side between cloth and flesh, the good blade broke off and Dennis stepped back with a rueful grin, the shivered steel in his hand. He flung it away and took his spear into action with Budd, without time to hand him back his guns, firing both pistols, left and right.

The rush wavered, less from panic than the cumbering of the slope with writhing bodies, that crawled and slid and rolled, with others that lay still in a human hurdle. The *mana* of white men was well established on that crater hill.

And then, while the survivors strove to cross the obstruction, while Budd reloaded once again and Dennis, his gun returned by Budd after its emptying, put in his unused extra clip; there came from the crest of the cone a medley of barbaric sound that blended into a pæan of triumph, of scorn, of wrath.

With his lips to the blowpipe, his cheeks like those of Æolus, McLean stood against the skyline, the bag of devils under his arm, their voices blaring, squealing; raucous, vindictive, blatant, threatening; swelling higher and higher with grace notes trilling, with the drones deepening as his lungs supplied more power to the reeds' vibration.

The warriors hesitated. Physically they knew nothing of fear. What psychology they possessed shriveled. The white wizard was going to let the ghosts out of the bag. Suddenly they saw their own dead and knew they had been supernaturally smitten. Their shallow minds had forgotten the ghost bag that even Ngati had been afraid of.

Louder and louder the pibroch shrilled and droned. With his head up, as if he led a regiment through the heather, Gavin McLean marched down the slope and with him came the two other white men, distributing death by bullets that were less heeded than the shrieking devils that clamored for the souls of the tribesmen, to make enslaved ghosts of them.

They turned and fled, throwing away their weapons, rushing through the grass, silent, but spreading such alarm that the women were running ahead of them toward the upper trail, their baskets and poles, the two spears with the gory trophies all forgotten, the wild clamor of the pipes coming after them on the wind.

"And that's that," said Connolly. "Gavin, I've naught to say about the harmony of your pipes from this time on. They played the sweetest music I ever heard when I saw those beggars lighting out as if banshees were after 'em. What were you playing?"

"Dinna ask me. I juist played for a' I was worth. I didna think of aught but blawin' an' lettin' the wind come through the chaunter an' the drones."

"Ah," said Dennis drily. "Maybe that's why I liked it so much. It was not music but it was magnificent. Mac," he went on earnestly. "Do you think Kiyuku or Kekko will have brought any fresh coconuts? Think of three of 'em, cool and sparkling, laced with Glenlivet. Man, I'd give twenty *doblons* right now for one. I could have cheerfully throttled Ngati when I saw him gobbling down the last of that flask. Let's hurry away from here. I suppose they'll come back after their dead and what else they've left before long."

"We'll be doon at the landing before they do," said McLean. "Takes time for them to get ower a fright. It'll take an hour for them to tell what happened and the rest won't be keen on comin' after us. No, they ken oor ship is doon there and they'll wait till they see us awa'. Too much *mana* for one day."

They left the dead strewn on the slope and made straight for the lower jungle trail, passing the spot where the women had dropped the baskets and the spears with the trophy heads. One of the baskets had come apart and its ghastly contents showed. Then Budd came upon one of the spears. The head had come off and rolled away a little. It lay on its side a little as if it was trying to accost him.

It was the head of a white man, bearded, with sunken eyes, staring dully from their sockets, mouth agape and the tongue showing between the rigid jaws with their discolored teeth.

Connolly came up behind him.

"Glory be!" exclaimed the Irishman. "'Tis Bully Edmonds!"

The other head was the head of Wilson. There might be more in the baskets, men of their crew, but they did not look. These two had trailed after them and had met disaster but they did not feel like leaving their heads behind for Ngati to gloat over.

For here surely was the reason why Ngati had been willing to let them go. The drums had announced that a white man's ship was in trouble, wrecked probably on the dangerous mushroom coral that infested the water between Tipye Island and the mainland, a trap for any skipper who did not know the Bauro currents and the local channels. The runner had brought the news of two white heads for the *hamal*.

Here was the reason for the lad Joni's jumping overboard in Levuka Harbor. The police boat gave him the excuse his smartness was looking for. The tale he had pitched of being the brother of the girl Connolly had protected, was false, inspired by Edmonds or Louis. He had spied to inform them of the plans of the trio, that Louis might circumvent them, ruin them by some clever trick.

Joni had not informed the police of their destination, of their purpose. Whatever he had learned in the cabin and from the gossip of the crew he had taken back to Louis and that astute person, seeing profit as well as revenge, had deputed Edmonds to follow, to highjack them if they came out with the coin.

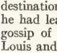
To leave the heads for the tribesmen of Niku would be to give them what they most desired to wipe out the sting of defeat. They could imagine Ngati's rage when he found them gone.

"What'll we do with them?" asked Budd.

McLean looked at him strangely, his face grim.

"I'm no sure yet," he said. "But I've some formalin aboard. I'll pickle 'em until we make up our minds."

An hour later they came to the last sharp turn in the trail. The bush was behind, the beach in front of them. Hard on the reef, bows lifted, they saw the *Starlight*, Edmonds' lawbreaking vessel. And, coming fast toward them, less than half a mile away, the welcome *Mbelema*."



BAURO was a speck; to the south and west the lookout was watching for the palms of the atoll where Budd was to stay, when he saw the stain of smoke that feathered on the horizon and soon showed above a hull that McLean, called on deck just after sunrise, stared at with narrowed eyes, and a deep line scored between them before he got the glasses that hung in the companionway and focussed them on the vessel.

His lips tightened as he went below and awakened Connolly.

"Dennis," he said as the Irishman opened sleepy eyes. "We're running into trouble and its comin' far an' fast to meet us. I'm fearful we canna dodge it. I dinna ken if it's wise to try."

"What is it?"

" 'Tis the *Pelican*, secondary cruiser, wi' fu' steam ahead an' makin' all o' twenty knots. She can run rings round us or sink us inside of an hour."

"After Jim?"

"It wad look that way. We could stow him awa', perhaps."

Connolly sat up.

"It's up to Jim, Gavin. It's different this time. First, we can't get away from a cruiser. Next, we've got money to fight with. It's his sayso."

"He'll face it."

Budd confirmed this. His eyes grew bleak and his jaw set as he dressed and came on deck. The *Pelican* was well up, coming on with a bone in her teeth, the red ensign flaming, guns peeping from her sponsons, powerful and aggressive. A signal broke out in fluttering flags.

"They're going to send a boat, —— them," said McLean.

Jim Budd grinned a little. It was the first time he had ever heard McLean use an oath.

A lieutenant, immaculate in white and gold, boarded them, bowed to McLean and gave a cheery "good morning."

"This the *Mbelema?* Captain McLean? You've got a man aboard by the name of Budd, an American?"

He looked at Jim who stepped forward. The officer put out his hand.

"Congratulate you, sir. We got a wireless two weeks ago to be on the lookout for the schooner, that you had escaped from justice. And all that. No use going into it. We didn't know where you'd gone and we were well out of the way. But now we're heading up for Tulagi, and yesterday the radio had good news for you. They've got the man who killed Parker. Parker took a girl away from him, it seems. Half-blood. He saw you fighting with Parker and he finished up the job. Showed his watch to another girl and she gave him away. Got a reward for it and probably used it for dowry to marry another man. What? Merry old whirligig! *Cherchez la femme*, I say.

"Captain Palmer sent me over with his compliments. All's well that ends well. Scotch? I'm on duty but I suppose this is an exception."

The *Pelican* was in a hurry to reach Tulagi where it was to lie while Court was held over native offenders. McLean told the genial lieutenant of the wreck he would find off Tipye Island but he said nothing of the circumstances, of their own quest, keeping a canny Scotch tongue in his own head and not mentioning the two he had in pickle. He had no mind to give them up as evidence.

"We'll look into that, sir," said the officer. "Little reprisal party. Why not a few shells into the bush? Eh? May not do much good. But it's the jolly old custom."

"A guid one," said McLean and briefly described the position of Niku's village. "It's thirty to one they don't score a direct hit," he said. "May set fire to the village. But it'll be a fine moral lesson to Ngati. It'll gie us the last word, so to speak. I canna get it oot o' my heid but what he expected to do us in on the way doon."

"It might be best for us to go direct to Suva to clear things up, Jim," he said after Connolly and he had exhausted their congratulations. "They'll not apologize but they may make some concession i' the matter o' the Crown claimin' a share in the treasure trove. They can if they wish, but the commissioner might release it under the circumstances. If they'd caught you they'd likely have hanged you by this. His High Lordship will recognize that and he's no sic' a bad sort."

"I didn't think of that," said Budd. "I wish he'd give me that grant on Ndonga and that you two would come in on it with me. We've got all the capital we want. There's big money in it. But I'm not going to give up my citizenship for it."

"Lad," said McLean, "you don't have to. I'm a British subject and so is Connolly, though Connolly will claim he is not, wi' some reason. I like your project fine. Parker is automatically oot o' it. I'll apply an' you'll come in as my partner, wi' Dennis here."

Connolly shook his head.

"Not me. You'll settle down, Gavin, like all Scots in their middle age, you'll lay out a golf course on Ndonga Island and you'll train the natives to play the pipes on the king's birthday. Probably you'll not marry. No wife would stand for dividing her affections with your pibroch.

"Jim there will find a girl back in the States when he goes back as sales manager while you're running the lumbering. He'll get married and play golf with you. Gavin 'll get thin as a fried herring and Jim will develop a pot. Not me."

"Mac, you'll not be using your schooner much. A launch will do you better. She's not big enough for freight, and I imagine you'll have to charter a steamer. Sell her to me, Gavin McLean. She suits me."

"Where are you going in her?"

"To look for Lost Island." Connolly smiled whimsically. "I'm a rover lads, and I can't be cured by prosperity, as you will. Let me know how much you want for her, Mac, and I'll buy her as soon as we realize on the loot. I'll call in on you both once in a while. Maybe I'll prospect that galleon you found in the bush.

"What are you figuring on doing with the heads in the bonito boxes?" he asked. "Give them to a museum?"

"Well," said Gavin, "the High Commissioner is fond of curios, I understand. We might give him one."

"Then let me have the other. I've a fancy for it. There's Spanish blood in my own veins. I'll keep it aboard in the cabin with the helmet and the dagger, Jim, unless you want it. Sorry I chucked away the sword and the corselet now. Let's have him out."

He took out the relic and held it in his hands.

"You were a rover, too," he said. "And a sword brother.

"A rovin', a-rovin'
Rovin' has been my ruin.

"He might even have been related to my ancestor. Anyway this is a better place for him than up in the *hamal*. How about those two heads you've got in formalin, Mac? Not that I want either of them."

"I was thinkin' of heading them up i' a keg when we got to Suva," said McLean. "Then shipping them to Louis Renault at Suva, collect."

THE END

SACRED BONES

by John Murray Reynolds

Author of "El Carcel," "*Medicinal Methods*," *etc.*

JIM REMSEN came to Dry Valley on the trail of *archæotherium ingens*, which is neither an infectious disease nor a lost Russian city, but a large entelodont common in the White River beds of the Lower Oligocene. That is to say, it was a large animal somewhat resembling a wild boar which rose, flourished, died out and became extinct a good many million years ago. Jim Remsen was a paleontologist, and pieces of ancient, silicified bone that were once part of some long-dead animal gave him as much of a thrill as most men get out of finding a good lead of gold quartz or a bonanza pocket.

Jim was outfitting in "Pop" Reilly's general store in Dry Valley, outfitting with a skill and finesse that showed experience. Pop ceased trying to sell him any of the complicated devices for making camp life easy that he kept for the auto tourists and gave rein to his curiosity regarding Jim's plans.

"You say you're going back in the bad lands, young feller?"

"Right you are. How about that flour?"

"There's your flour. What do you want there? Ain't no gold in that country."

"I'm not after gold. How about some matches?"

"Here y'are, only fifteen cents for a box that must have a couple o' hundred in it. Where do you come from?"

"New Jersey."

"Jersey? Well, I come from Ohio myself once. That's pretty well east, right near Jersey, you might say."

Pop considered his customer thoughtfully. His sunburned face looked open and good-natured, and—with his curiosity become almost unendurable—Pop decided that a direct question would do no harm.

"What are you looking for in the bad lands, anyway?"

"Bones."

"Bones?"

"Bones."

Pop forgot to chew for fully half a minute while he stared at the other. Jim continued checking off the items on his list with a perfectly grave face and no signs of insanity. Pop was suspicious of a possible joke.

"What kind of bones?" he demanded warily.

"Bones of *archæotherium ingens*."

"Sounds like one of them foreigners. Who was he?"

"He was an animal that lived a long time ago. I hope to find some skeletons back there in the desert."

"Oh!" Pop's voice was vibrant with relief at finally understanding matters. "You're one of them something-ologists. I know." Then his face clouded and he looked at Jim thoughtfully.

"There was a feller like you came here about three years back. He was looking for skeletons buried in the desert. I suppose he was after this same artic-whatever-you-call-it thing."

"Did he find any?"

"Don't think so. Leastways, there wasn't no bones there except his own when they found him."

"Found him?"

"Yep. He evidently fell off the mesa and broke his neck. That is, some folks says he fell—I say he jumped."

"What makes you think that?" Jim was at last seriously interested, listening to the other's every word.

"Because I know that part of the desert is ha'nted!"

"By what?"

"By a ha'nt! What do you suppose—a fairy queen?"

"Did you ever see it?"

"No, but I've heard it. And I've heard tell of them that did see it. Kind of a vague white shape shining like moonlight and moving around quick-like."

Jim grinned broadly.

"And what did *you* hear that time you thought you heard it?"

Pop sensed the amusement in the other's tone and looked up sharply.

"I didn't *think* I heard it, young feller. I don't go around thinking things. What I hear I hear."

"And what was that?"

"A lot of groans out there in the starlit desert where there wasn't no one to groan, and some one singing in a queer quavering voice where there wasn't no one to sing. If you want my advice, young feller, you'll keep away from that Lone Mesa country."

Jim laughed, shook his head, and dismissed the whole thing as a fiction—until later.

THE Cosmopolitan Museum expedition to the fossil fields of the Lone Mesa country rode out of Dry Valley's one street in the early dawn. The leader of the expedition was Jim Remsen, the rank and file consisted of Jim Remsen and the chief cook, dish washer, and general handyman was none other than the same Jim Remsen. The museum had been short of funds at the time when Jim had come with his tale of probable rich fossil finds in the Lone Mesa district and had been unable to even give him an assistant. They had rather hesitated about doing anything at all, but his enthusiasm was so great that they finally gave him enough money to outfit himself alone for a short trip. He was satisfied, and with a horse and two burros as company in lieu of fellow scientists he headed into the desert.

Four nights later he pitched camp with more care than usual. He camped within half a mile of the single exceptionally tall mesa that stood apart from the rest and gave the region its name. It was his intention to keep his camp in that spot for several days, using it as a base while he prospected for fossils. His practised eye had spotted a number of things that indicated that this was likely to be a fertile field for research, and his hopes were good.

Draining the last cup of coffee, Jim stretched his long legs into a more comfortable position, lighted his battered old pipe and gave himself up to peaceful meditation. The sun was setting, and the western half of the sky glowed with a broad band of beryl below crimson, the distant mesas standing up sharp and clear against the sky and seeming strangely near. Purple shadows lurked in their lee, and the foreground ran into the middle distance with a vague mistiness. The sun dropped, stars appeared along the eastern sky, somewhere a coyote howled. Gradually night came to the desert, a night clear and warm at the start with the aftermath of the sun's heat still held by the dry ground.

As the embers of his tiny brushwood fire died and the chill of desert night began to creep in the air, Jim prepared to spread his blankets. One of his hobbled burros suddenly wheeled and stood with upflung head. From somewhere far off there had come a faint sound, too dim to be defined. Jim stood and listened for a few seconds, then had just stooped to his blankets again when it was repeated, this time louder. It seemed to come from very far off, a low plaintive wail, half human, half bestial. The tone of it jarred some dim chord in his memory. In spite of himself, Jim shivered slightly and laid his hand on his gun. Pop Reilly's warning came back to him and, although not a believer in ghosts, it gave him an unpleasant feeling. The sound was not repeated, and after a while he turned in. For a while he lay awake, trying to place the elusive memory that the far-off sound had aroused, but he fell asleep during the process, and in the bright, clear air of morning it seemed too unimportant to worry about.

The methods of a fossil hunter in bad lands country greatly resemble those of a prospector. Jim roved around all the next day, continually watching the ground for likely signs, paying particular attention to the dry gullies that had at one time or another been watercourses. As he was following along one of these late in the afternoon, he gave a shout and went down on his knees in the dust at the bottom of the gully. Lying in the dust, he had found a small piece of bone and, after brushing it off with a camel's-hair brush he always carried in his pocket and giving it a brief study through his magnifying glass, he carefully wrapped it up and stowed it away in his pocket.

Glancing at the slope of the ground to see which direction had been upstream when the gully had been a watercourse, Jim slowly followed the dry channel in that direction. He examined the ground with great care as he went, finding two more pieces of broken silicified bone in the gully bottom and a small complete bone in perfect condition. Satisfied that he was on a promising lead, he marked the spot with care. As a prospector finding traces of placer gold works upstream to find their origin, so Jim was working upstream to find the skeleton from which these scattered bits of bone had been washed down in some ancient freshet.

The next day, about a quarter of a mile above the last fragment, he came to what at first looked like a large boulder imbedded in the side of the gully. Alternate careful picking with a fine pointed awl and brushing with a camel's-hair brush revealed the smooth, reddish brown surface of what promised to be an almost perfect skull of *archaeotherium ingens*. The normal procedure would have been to remove the skull together with a considerable portion of the surrounding matrix and wrap it for transportation in strips of burlap soaked in flour paste, but the skull was in such fine condition that his enthusiasm grew. He loosened the heavy skull from the soil, laboriously lifted it up out of the gully to the desert floor and removed most of the matrix right there, spending the greater part of the day in the process. He attacked the solidified soil with a tooth-edged sculptor's chisel until the surface of the bone was reached, then bringing the awl and brush into play. Jubilant with his find, he finally left off working on the skull to bring pick and shovel and dig up the bank of the arroyo in search of the rest of the skeleton.

THAT night Jim turned in, tired but contented, and almost immediately fell into a deep sleep that lasted until sometime around two or three o'clock. He awoke with that vague feeling of disquiet that comes from being suddenly awakened by an unknown cause. He sat up and listened. Nothing disturbed the stillness of the desert night for a minute or so, and then there came that same weird sound that he had heard the first evening—a sound faint and unreal, cadenced and somehow musical, rising and falling on the still air and seeming a long way off. He shivered as he had when he heard it that first time and wondered what dim corner of his memory it was that the sound aroused. It was not repeated, but he slept poorly the rest of the night.

When he stopped work at the end of the previous day, Jim had dug a pit deep enough to assure him that the whole skeleton was imbedded at this particular spot, and he started back early in the morning in the hope of finishing the job that day. He located the gully in question and strode along it rapidly, whistling cheerfully as he went. He had left the skull and the half dozen other bones dug up the day before lying on the ground just at the edge of the gully, and he walked quickly along, expecting every turn on the gully to reveal the heavy, grinning skull of *archæotherium*, with its strange bony lobes on the sides of the jaw, leering at him over the edge of the bank. Just as he was beginning to think that he must certainly have walked more than the half mile or so separating the spot from his camp he suddenly stopped and the whistled tune died away on a sour note.

The gully had abruptly ended in a cross ravine, and Jim was perfectly sure that he had not come this far the day before. He retraced his steps slowly, not whistling now, examining the sides of the arroyo very carefully, and finally came to the spot he was looking for. There was no possible doubt; once he climbed from the ravine to the surface of the desert he saw the place where he had been digging, and his light pick and shovel lying where he had left them. In the bottom of the pit he even saw a few crumbs of tobacco that had fallen while he was filling his pipe—but the valuable fossils, the skull and other bones, had completely vanished.

Jim wasted the rest of the morning in vain search for the missing fossils. He searched every inch of the vicinity, even going as far as the base of the solitary tall mesa, but the bones were gone as entirely as though they had disintegrated into the desert air. The ground showed some traces of disturbance, but he was not enough of a tracker to read the signs.

In the afternoon he gave up the search and again set to work digging, and by evening he had unearthed the rest of the skeleton. It was a find of considerable scientific and commercial value, for although not a new species, it was an exceptionally complete and well preserved specimen, and Jim would have been greatly elated—if it had not been for the loss of the skull and those half dozen other bones. The mystery of their disappearance never left his mind for a moment, and a dozen times he would stop in the middle of a movement, a shovelful of dirt suspended in mid-air, while he thought over some new angle of the case.

That night Jim went back to his camp by the water-hole as usual, ate supper and sat smoking until it was dark. Then he threw a couple of blankets over his shoulders and started off for the gully. Although it had been impossible to tell exactly the location of those queer sounds he had heard by night, they might as easily have come from over by the gully as from anywhere else. The main result of the afternoon's cogitation had been that those sounds were in some way connected with the disappearance of those fossils.

When Jim reached the site of his digging operations—feeling his way in the starlight and only flashing his light when absolutely necessary—he found everything quiet and undisturbed. The myriad bones of the *archaeotherium* skeleton lay in regular rows as he had placed them, and nothing had been moved. He selected a slight hollow noticed earlier in the day, spread his blankets, and lay down. He dared not smoke, so he lay there quietly, dozing off from time to time, but managing to avoid going into a sound sleep. After a while the moon rose, shedding a dim radiance over the lifeless desert, and shortly afterward he caught his breath as he heard that which he had been expecting.

That plaintive wail that he had heard twice before came floating to his ears, far louder and clearer than on the other occasions, and after the first few notes Jim nearly laughed aloud with relief. This was no grim specter wailing in sorrow and pain, but some one singing in a high, cracked voice the words of the old revival hymn:

> "I know a happy land,
>   Far, far away,
> Where saints in glory stand,
>   In bright array."

DISTANCE, strange echoes from the mesa and the way the singer's tuneless voice distorted the familiar tune had robbed the song of its identity; so that when he had heard it from far off, there had been just enough of the tune left to stir his memory without arousing it.

Out from the shadows of a mesa and into the gradually strengthening moonlight came the bent figure of a very old man, white-haired, long-bearded, clad in rags. He plodded slowly along, leading an aged pack-burro, and as he went he raised his cracked voice in song.

This was the answer to the mystery of the Lone Mesa country, the ghost that had haunted it for years. Some old prospector, gone mad with the solitude and the loneliness, wandering aimlessly around the desert and for some reason sticking mainly to that region. Jim suspected that the old man's madness came upon him mainly at night, and that he probably wandered into Dry Valley or some other town every now and then for supplies without being noticed as different from many another old desert rat.

The old man came nearer, and when the light of the rising moon revealed the bones of the fossils laid in their orderly rows, the quavering song stopped and the newcomer dropped the lead line—whereupon the aged burro immediately stopped and stood motionless—and walked over to the fossils, muttering to himself. He knelt down then and, although it was not yet light enough to see clearly, it seemed to the concealed watcher that he was praying. A minute later he again got creakingly to his feet, and began to gather up the bones.

Jim decided that he had been a spectator to this drama long enough, and climbed out of his blankets. He walked over to the old prospector.

"What are you planning to do with those, old-timer?" he asked pleasantly. The ancient laboriously straightened up and looked at him with bright little eyes that yet seemed curiously out of focus.

"Impious man, son of Apollyon, would you touch these hallowed bones?" he quavered. The other tried to reason with the pitiful madman as he would with a child.

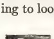
"They're just the bones of some animal," he said reassuringly. "Give them to me and I'll take care of them." He stepped closer, and the desert rat scampered away.

"Son of Mammon, these are the bones of the lion that Samson slew in the desert. They are holy—touch them not."

Jim stepped forward again, and the old man started to run. The skinny old legs gave way after a dozen steps, and he fell. He relinquished the bones and rolled over on his back, but lay with his eyes closed and did not rise. Impelled by a sudden motive of pity Jim bent over him, and in that moment two lean, wiry arms flashed up and locked around his neck. Jim tried to shake him loose but the old fellow only swung around with a clever twist as the younger man jumped to his feet and clung to his back, digging his knees into his spine and gripping his throat with sinewy hands in which there was at the moment the terrific strength of the insane. Blood pounded in Jim's head, and his efforts to loosen the other's grip grew weaker. Painfully he reached his hand down for his gun, but it had slipped from its holster in the struggle. With a last effort he reached up and back, groping blindly for the other's hair or beard, while bright flashes appeared before his eyes and the desert seemed to undulate in waves, but the madman tightened his grip a trifle and everything went black.

As Jim returned to consciousness his first sensation was of a great pain and soreness in his throat. For a while the mere fact of this filled his awakening mind; then came the realization that he was in some way hanging head down. An attempt to investigate this brought out the fact that his hands were lashed behind him. Gradually the last of the mists cleared from his brain, and he found that he had been secured hand and foot and thrown over the shoulder of the old desert rat. The latter was now chanting a hymn as he walked, and the ease with which he carried the younger man's weight showed that the strength of his madness was still upon him.

The old man climbed to the top of the tall mesa by a series of inconspicuous but effective steps cut in the far side, dragging Jim up along with him. He dropped his victim on the top near the edge, and as soon as he was left alone, Jim set to work trying to loosen his bonds.



THE moon had fully risen and silvered the desert with a soft, unreal light. From where he lay Jim could see the long gully, and beside it the hole he had dug in obtaining the fossil. Quite some distance off he saw his own camp, with the two burros near-by. Turning his head the other way, he grunted with surprize, for the flat top of the mesa was thickly strewn with bones; not human bones, but the remains of those extinct animals that he sought in the interests of science. Near by lay the identical grinning skull of *archæotherium ingens* that had vanished the previous night.

The desert rat moved among the fossils, muttering softly and occasionally kneeling to pray. One pile he addressed as Saul, another as David. He evidently thought himself the caretaker of a vast burying-ground of Biblical characters, bringing all the fossils that he had run across from time to time in the course of the years to the top of this mesa.

As the moon rose higher, the old man walked to the edge of the mesa and began to talk to the silver disk, waving his arms as he did so. Most of what he said was too indistinct for the other to catch, and what he did hear meant little.

"Smile down on these thy servants, O Lord—dead, long dead—accept the sacrifice—even as did Abraham on the mount, even as did this sacrifice tonight, O Lord."

The madman left off for a moment and came over to Jim. He dragged him to within a foot of the edge of the mesa and then returned to his chanting. Suddenly Jim realized his intent, and the meaning of the constant repetition of the word "sacrifice" in the apparently aimless talk. One good push, and he would go hurtling down to the desert below and a probable broken neck. The madman, having thus sacrificed to his God, would then only need to come down and remove the cords that had bound his victim—and there would be another scientist mysteriously dead in the Lone Mesa country. Jim tried to writhe away from the edge, and worked frantically on the ropes without apparent effect.

Abruptly stopping his chant, the desert rat came over and grasped the helpless man by the shoulders. Unable to free his hands, and thinking that he might perhaps distract the other's mind for a little while, Jim asked—

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I make sacrifice to the sainted dead," he answered, a fanatical exultation in his tone. "Rejoice, my brother!"

"Why rejoice?" asked Jim, clutching at any means to hold the old man in conversation and delay the end.

"For the Lord said, 'Blessed is the sacrifice.' Your death will be very pleasing to the saints."

"You mean those piles of old bones?" The younger man's nerves were on edge and his tone was sharper than before, a sharpness which found an instant reaction in the other.

"Sinner! Blasphemer! Take back those words!" he shouted, releasing his victim's shoulders in order to wave his arms. Seeing the wild light in his eyes and the excited clenching and unclenching of his hands, Jim had a sudden flash of inspiration.

"Do you know what you're talking about?" he asked sneeringly, deliberately trying to irritate.

"Do I know? Do I know?" shouted the other. "Haven't I talked with them all for years? With David there, and Saul, and Samson?"

"You're all wrong," drawled Jim derisively, making his tone as insulting as possible. "They're just a lot of old dead cows and pigs."

"It's a lie, a —— lie!" screamed the maniac, stamping his foot like an angry child. "There's David, and there's Samson, and there's the blood-sweating Behemoth itself, just like the old sky pilot used to tell!"

"You're crazy," mocked Jim. "You're crazy, old-timer, that's what's the matter with you, you're crazy!"

For some minutes longer the strange dialogue went on, Jim derisive and mocking, the old man increasingly excited. Toward the end he became entirely incoherent, spluttering strange things in his anger, half the time mouthing weird, wordless sounds. Flecks of foam began to appear on his lips. At last, goaded beyond endurance, he flung up his arms in an attempt to call the fire of heaven down upon his tormenter; and in that instant his weakened old brain gave way under the violent emotional strain of his rage and he fell senseless to the ground.

By the time the desert rat recovered consciousness, again a harmless and comparatively sane old man with a quavering voice, the other man had freed himself from his bonds and the danger was past. The next day Jim cached the rest of the skeleton and packed the skull of *archæotherium* on one of his burros, covering it over with canvas. That one specimen would be enough to persuade the museum to send an expedition with enough equipment to carry away the rich fossils of the Lone Mesa district.

He had intended to take the old man back to Dry Valley with him, thinking him safer in an asylum, but he slipped away some time in the night. Jim awakened just in time to hear his plaintive song fading away far off in the desert.

POP REILLY looked up as Jim Remsen again walked into his general store.

"Welcome back to Dry Valley, young feller," he said cheerfully. "Did you find them bones?"

"I did."

"And did you see anything of the ghost?"

"I ran into a crazy old prospector wandering around singing hymns. That must have been what you heard."

Pop looked blank, but after a couple of moments a thought came to him. He was always tenacious of his ideas, and furthermore, he was not going to let any young upstart deprive him of belief in the ghost that had provided him with an always interesting topic of conversation for the past three years or so.

"Well, young feller," he said, turning away with an air of finality, "that's all right for you. But I says, if a man's crazy, something must have drove him mad. And I'll bet all the valuable bones in the desert to a plug of that there tobacco that it was a ghost done it."

BROTHERS-IN-ARMS

A Complete Novelette

by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Author of "Vengeance," "The Black Thief," etc.

IT HAS been told how Henry Plantagenet, lord of northern France from Seine of the sea, wedded Aliénor of Aquitaine, and with her won the better part of the south, with its fine towns and fiery fighting men. But how the thing came about makes a better tale, in which Cercamon the troubadour and Pierre Faidit, his friend, played perilous parts.

The two comrades sat in Pierre's chamber, high in the keep of Chinon West Castle, just under the fat bulge of the battlements. Pierre gazed moodily down upon the steep red roofs of the town and the sun-washed plain beyond, through which the broad Vienne wound in gracious contours. Through the one embrasure the April light filtered scantily in past his broad shoulders, and struck fire from the angry eyes of the troubadour.

"It is a graceless thing," Cercamon cried, "with no good in it!"

Pierre shrugged, and was silent, chewing his bitter thoughts. For some time neither spoke again, their thoughts grappling with the strange things that had happened this fortnight past.

It was 1152, in an early, lush spring; and Henry Plantagenet had moved his court from Caen in the north to Chinon in mellow Touraine. No sooner were his orders given than messengers—swift, secret messengers—stole off by night to take the news where it would be most valued: to London and to Paris. Stephen of England, whose crown Henry claimed, was surprized and joyous at the tidings, having expected his foe to use the fine spring weather for a swift stroke at the Channel ports; but Louis of France ceased to sleep of nights.

Count of Anjou and lord of Maine, Duke of Normandy and Brittany, master of Touraine, Henry Plantagenet coveted a yet wider realm. Being well served, and possessed of the huge frame and dominating temper of his race, he stood every chance of getting what he wanted. It was the full knowledge of these things that made King Stephen bless the Saints when Henry's spears were removed far south of the Channel—and the same knowledge made Louis VII curse the day he had wasted the strength of France in a futile crusade.

In Henry's own court there were those who guessed much, and shrewdly, concerning this journey to Chinon. For not only princes, but barons, had their spies out, knowing that this year was big with the fate of Europe. Every man who boasted noble blood and had swords to fight for him waited on events to fling himself into the mad scramble for lands and power; every prince watched his barons, fearing to read the treachery he suspected in their hearts.

But though some guessed why Henry left the coast across from England just when all was ripe for a second conquest of the island, few were right. For all his youth, his wild Plantagenet temper and his boisterous ways, Henry kept his plans close in his own red head, letting the world whisper itself hoarse.

His brother Geoffrey—a precocious, handsome lad, whom men liked as much as he liked women—was by turns sullen and feverishly excited, ripe for rebellion. He had asked Henry for Touraine and Anjou, and had received only three castles, including the double stronghold of Chinon. Now Henry was his guest in Chinon, and Geoffrey found himself unable to give commands even in his own house. But he, too, was a Plantagenet, ready to take what was refused him. Only Henry had brought three times as many men as Geoffrey could muster. So Geoffrey went about, very softly, making friends of dangerous men. By the time the beeches had opened their vivid leaves the soft April air was sultry with conspiracy. The ladies were discontent, for their lovers deserted them to mutter together in corners, or to grind their swords.

All this was bad enough, but to Cercamon the troubadour it was not the worst. Pierre, his dearest friend, his brother-in-arms, had lost the duke's favor. Cercamon himself still kept his place of honor at Henry's table, received generous largesse whenever it pleased him to lift his perfect voice in song and was courted by all who desired the ducal smile; but all this was less than nothing beside the injustice that had been done his friend. Pierre took it well, which but made Cercamon the bitterer.

"Why? Why?" he cried for the fiftieth time. "What have you done to displease him?"

Pierre twisted his big shoulders.

"Nothing. But it is his will."

"Bah! He is a petulant boy, this duke!" Cercamon was angry, his blue-green eyes blazing in his hot, handsome face.

"Has he forgotten all you have done to serve him? Does he not know it is to you, no less than to Thomas Becket, that he owes his strength in England? Have you not risked your life for him a thousand times, ay, and saved his?"

Pierre got up from his uncomfortable seat in the embrasure and stretched himself to his full height. He towered above his friend, a man in the prime of life, immensely tall, with the strength and grace of a gladiator. His dark, lean face, clear-cut and hawk-like as any Roman Cæsar's, was bitten deep with the lines of care and fatigue; his great dark eyes were heavy with pain. None would have guessed him a year younger than the light-hearted troubadour.

"Look you, lad," he said quietly, "Henry is our master, and it is a man's duty to serve his master well. I take that to mean without complaining. Think you it will help either of us to rail at him?"

He turned, took down from the wall his baldric and unsheathed his great sword. Squatting on the floor, he laid the beautiful weapon across his knees, and began to rub its perfect edge with a fine hone. The stone whispered against the blue, damascened steel; the sun, slanting in a thick beam, struck fire from the jeweled hilt. As he caressed the blade, the sorrow vanished from his eyes and his thin lips relaxed in a faint smile.

Cercamon watched him with understanding. Pierre de l'Espée—Pierre of the Sword—ay, he was well named. By the sword he lived; he loved his sword; no man in France was his equal in duel or mêlée. His sword was to him what wife and children are to other men: there was comfort in the mere touch of it.

"I ride to Angers within the hour," Cercamon broke the silence, "on the duke's errand. I am to escort his mother, the Lady Mathilde, to Chinon. That means there is something afoot. He always seeks her counsel when he plans some bold stroke."

Pierre looked up with interest.

"You do not know? He has not confided in you?"

The troubadour shook his long locks.

"No. And that is strange, too. Till lately you and I both shared his secrets; but for this fortnight past he has taken neither of us into his counsels. I must ride now. Remember this, Pierre: If he wrongs you further, he wrongs me, and I will hold him to account. We are brothers-in-arms."

Pierre sheathed his sword with a clang.

"Ay, we are brothers-in-arms," he answered fondly. "For that reason my loyalty is your loyalty, and you shall not act, speak or think against the duke till I do."

Cercamon laughed dryly.

"That will be never! Well, so be it; I have some name for loyalty myself."

He departed, his gay crimson-and-blue mantle flaunting behind him.

Pierre hung up sword and baldric and slowly went down the stair. He reached the inner bailey just in time to see his friend spur over the drawbridge, velvet cap ablaze in the sun. A group of Henry's Norman nobles stood gazing after him.

"OUR pretty bird goes to sing in some lady's bower!" sneered one, a tall, lean man in a rich silken robe. "A fine thing, truly, that men of birth must bow to such as he!"

"Ay!" growled a thick-barreled knight in rusty mail. "And our nightingale is but a cuckoo after all. I have heard it said he knows not his own father!"

He who had spoken first turned at the crunch of Pierre's mailed feet on the flags; and at sight of Pierre's eyes his swarthy face paled. He plucked at his companion's sleeve. But Pierre was on them in one long stride. Grasping the big man's shoulder with fingers that stung through the mail, he whirled him about.

"Sir Ormeric D'Orbec," he said quite softly, "it ill beseems a gentleman to say in another's absence what he dares not say to his face. If Cercamon were here, you would be the first to fawn on him. Since he is not here, I, his friend, tell you you lie!"

D'Orbec started back, his eyes wide with fear. Then, seeing that Pierre wore no weapon, he drew his hard features into a sneer.

"Fine words!" he mocked. "If a gentleman had spoken them, I would make him eat steel. But one does not fight with such as you—the son of a fisherman!" He pinched his nose with his fingers, as if to shut out the stench of rotten herring. The lean man beside him laughed and imitated the gesture.

Pierre understood. Knowing he had lost the duke's favor, the proud Norman nobles, long jealous of his influence at court, now made the most of their chance to humiliate him. The duke would not protect Pierre from insult now—and men who feared to cross swords with him could refuse to give him satisfaction on the ground of his low birth.

"You will insult me—and not fight?" he spoke gently.

D'Orbec drew back a little from the flame in his eyes, but answered insolently.

"I fight only with my equals!"

"Then go bicker with the dogs for bones!" roared Pierre, and drove his fist into D'Orbec's face. The thick Norman crashed to the pavement, and lay still.

The lean man half-drew his sword, but dropped his hands as Pierre advanced on him.

"You shall pay for this!" he snarled, backing away. "Ay, with the last drop of your blood!"

"Strike in the dark, then, Sir Hugo D'Orbec!" Pierre retorted grimly.

THE torches made the great hall stifling, and from every arrow-slot the tapestries were drawn back to let in the cooler outside air. A nightingale sang somewhere in the dark; but the knights and ladies of Henry's court, preoccupied with food and drink and laughter, scarce heard. The merriment was forced. All felt a tension in the air, for the duke was angry.

Henry Plantagenet sat at the head of the table on the dais, as beseemed a man master wherever he lodged. On his right sat his brother Geoffrey; but few had eyes for the lithe, blond boy. Henry, flushed of face, big-limbed, sat with his elbows on the table, chin cupped in his great hands, his eyes glaring like a wounded lion's.

A man appeared in the doorway, and straightway all fell silent. Men paused with tankards halfway to their bearded lips; white-necked women peered over the shoulders of their table-mates to see the better. Geoffrey Plantagenet leaned back in his chair, watching through half-closed eyes. His cheeks grew flushed as his brother's; his hands shook with excitement.

Slowly the man came forward toward the dais, halted and bowed low.

The duke leveled an accusing finger at him.

"Pierre Faidit!" he cried—and his voice was a maddened bellow—"Pierre Faidit! You have struck a Norman knight—you, a man of no birth! By the splendor of heaven, I will make an example of you!"

Pierre's head went up, and his eyes met the angry duke's full.

"There was a time, my lord," he said with quiet dignity, "when you would have forgiven me more than this. I trust you may forgive me now, when you know the provocation."

Henry rose, struggling for self-control. His big features worked with passion. At last, every muscle rigid, he spoke; and every face in the hall, save Pierre's, was white and frightened. The duke had seldom been so moved. When men had seen him so before, he had wreaked his wrath with a fury not to be forgotten; nor did innocent onlookers always escape.

But now he was calm—calm as a sultry day, just before lightning strikes.

"We have done you too much honor," he said, with a gentleness that stung. "You have grown to regard yourself as the equal of better men. We must teach you humility. From this night on you are no longer captain of our guard. Lay no hand on a Norman gentleman again, lest that which befall you be a terror to all France. Go to your chamber, and bide there till I send for you!"

Pierre withdrew, his head higher than ever; but his eyes stung with restrained tears of rage and humiliation. *Deus!* How he had served this tempestuous boy, ay, loved him! What a reward for his labor, his sacrifice, the blood he had gladly given! Shamed before all the court! When he reached the corridor his proud, firm step faltered; he stumbled up the stair to his chamber.

Ormeric D'Orbec, his face swathed in bandages, glared after him. His brother's eyes met his across the table. Hugo raised his black eyebrows; Ormeric nodded and grinned wickedly. The knights and ladies, seeing the cloud lift from their lord's brow, heaved a great sigh of relief, and fell to food and laughter.

Pierre sat for many hours in his dark chamber, staring out at the stars and the lights of the town mirrored in the dark bosom of the Vienne. He had never known such wretchedness—nay, not since that bitter night, five years since, when he had stumbled over the dead body of his first lord, Alphonse-Jourdain of Toulouse. But there was a bitterness in this. The injustice of it, the cruelty!

His door creaked open, but he scarce heard it, and did not stir. Then a voice—

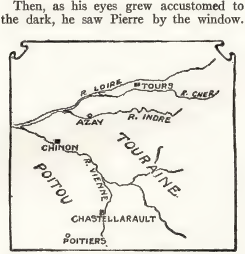
"Pierre!"

Pierre started to his feet. The voice was stern and hoarse. The door closed, and an unseen hand shot the bolts home.

"Ay, lord!" Pierre answered, the words scarce audible.

"Where are you, Pierre?"

Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the dark, he saw Pierre by the window.



Swiftly Henry Plantagenet strode to his officer's side, and flung one thick arm about his shoulders.

"Pierre! Forgive me!"

"My—my lord! You are not angry with me?"

The duke would have knelt at his feet, but Pierre prevented him. He did not understand, but a great gladness flooded his heart. For a moment the duke fought for words, like the awkward boy he was; then they came surging:

"My knights—even my barons—were jealous of the favors I have shown you. They murmur that I take you, a peasant's son, into my secrets, and pay no heed to them, the gentlefolk. They hate you, Pierre. The time draws near when I must strike for England. God knows it is you—you and Becket—who have won me friends there, that your valor and your cunning have gained me adherents without whose aid I should not dare to strike. But from the moment my ships anchor in an English port, it is my barons and their men-at-arms who will win the throne for me. Without their loyal support I can do nothing. To hold them to me, I must sacrifice you. For this reason I have lately denied you my confidence, shamed you, taken away your commission—and it may be that I must wrong you yet more. Can you bear this, Pierre, for me? Knowing that it is only for a little while, and that, as soon as I dare, I will more than atone? Knowing that your lord loves you, Pierre?"

The swordsman groped in the dark for his master's hand.

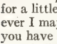
"All this, and more, will I bear, if it may help my lord."

"It will not be for long," Henry resumed. "By midsummer, at least, I shall send you to England again, to make ready for my coming. Now there are other matters which require me to leave England alone for a little. Remember this, Pierre: Whatever I may say to you, whatever I may do, you have my love and trust. Endure, and you shall be rewarded. I have stolen from my bed to tell you this. I dared not let any one see me at your door."

"As you trust me, my lord, so I trust you," Pierre responded. "But—it were better that you tell Cercamon what you have told me."

Henry laughed softly.

"Right! He loves me, I think, but he loves you more. He is as true to you as hilt to hand— Sleep well!"



BARSAND the armorer held the heavy hauberk at arm's length. "He is a man who can wear this!" he laughed. "Were its workmanship less fine, 'twould burden even you, Pierre! I have pieced it here, where the arbalest bolt went through; but though I take pride in my work, I cannot match the rings. Its maker was a master of craft!"

Pierre Faidit donned the hauberk and told over two gold crowns.

"Your work will turn arrows, Barsand, and that means much. A Cordovan Moor forged those rings. My thanks!"

Leaving the armorer's, where bare blades and shirts of mail hung ghostly in the flare of the forge, he passed out into the narrow street. It was dark as a cavern after the red glow of the smithy; the tall houses, with their projecting eaves, shut out what little light the stars afforded. Peering about him, Pierre took the middle of the cobbled way, which writhed like a snake through the foulest part of the old town. The stink of the marshes stung his nostrils.

His mail made din enough as he strode along; but the town was still as death, save for the faint *tink-tink* of hammer on steel that pursued him, ever fainter, from Barsand's shop. The armorer worked late on the duke's business, and so was granted leave to labor and burn lights even this late after curfew. All else was dark and silent, for the duke enforced the law with a hard hand.

Of a sudden Pierre, with his soldier's ear, caught the thin grate of steel on stone. Stopping instantly, he clapped hand to hilt and listened. It was nothing to him that other armored men—who might have leave, as he himself had—walked the streets after curfew; but it was much that they walked stealthily. Stretch his ears as he might, he heard nothing more. Treading so softly that his mail scarce rustled, he resumed his way toward the castle.

A casement opened just to the left of him, pouring forth a flood of light that threw him into full relief against the opposite whitewashed wall. This was ill, at an hour when none might lawfully unbar shutter or kindle torch or candle. Acting swiftly as suspicion awoke in him, Pierre leaped back into the protecting darkness, sword out. Even as he did so, a squat figure sprang into the patch of light, ran swiftly after him and was likewise swallowed by the gloom. Something hissed through the air, and a point thudded against Pierre's breast.

Its force weakened by his retreat, the blow glanced off his mail. Pierre drove his sword forward in one swift thrust, felt it tear home through steel and flesh and wrenched it out. Some one fell with a clang of steel and a groan.

The casement slammed shut, blotting out the light; a shutter crashed, and bolts flew home. Plainly he who had opened the window had heard, not seen, and had been satisfied with the groan that bore witness of a man's death. Pierre glided across the lane, flattened himself against the wall of the house opposite and waited.

For a long moment nothing happened; then a hoarse whisper came from somewhere in the shadows—

"Is he dead?"

"There are two, then!" Pierre reflected grimly, his fingers tightening about his hilt.

Then the whisper again, frightened at the silence—

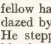
"Ormeric!"

Smiling, Pierre stole forward. Silence again—then the *clang-clang-clang* of running steel-shod feet. Dashing forward in pursuit, Pierre struck once with his heavy blade, felt it tear through cloth, and brought up crashing against a projecting cornice.

The feet ran on, turned a corner and were lost in the long, straight Rue du Grand Carroi that leads straight to the castle.

It was useless to follow farther. The fellow had a fair start, and Pierre was still dazed by his collision with the house wall. He stepped back, and slipped in a pool of blood. Striking flint on steel, he caught a brief glimpse of a distorted face staring up from the pavement.

"Ormeric D'Orbec!" he muttered. "Then he who fled was his brother Hugo. And the duke bade me keep my hands off Norman knights!" With a shrug he resumed his way.



IT WAS very late when he climbed to his room in the western tower, but he spent half an hour putting a fine edge on his sword where it had gone through D'Orbec's hauberk. He sat long reflecting on the night's work. Just after second cock-crow his door swung open, and the duke entered. Henry's face was troubled, but not angry.

"The watch have found Sir Ormeric's corpse in the town," he said, eyeing Pierre nervously.

Pierre nodded.

"They found it where I left it," he answered. "Ormeric and one other—Hugo—aided by the folk of the nearest house, laid an ambush for me. Hugo escaped."

Henry frowned.

"You can prove it was Hugo?"

"Hardly. But the folk of that house can be made to confess."

The duke shook his head.

"The body was found far from any house, by the quay. Could you tell the house by day? No? Then where is your proof? I bade the watch hold their tongues; but if that other was Hugo, there will be trouble over this. He will swear you slew his brother treacherously."

"The wound was in front," Pierre pointed out, "and Ormeric's sword in his hand."

"Not when the watch discovered him—he was weaponless. You have had to do with cunning men, lad, and they have outmatched you. Even if we find the house, its people will swear to what Hugo says, and how can I prove they lie? Nay, Pierre, for your own sake and mine this must not come to trial. I could and would protect you; but then my barons would turn on me. My position is perilous. The Normans, jealous of you already, will cry for your blood. When I refuse, they will rebel. I could deal with them bloodily, but I need their loyalty, as I have told you. And I suspect that Geoffrey conspires against me to wrest Anjou from me."

"Why not give it to him, and so win his support?" Pierre urged.

"Give a province to that boy, who has never learned to rule himself?"

Henry spoke scornfully, and Pierre knew he was right. Young Geoffrey was a spoiled child, whose tyrannous caprice would do more harm in Anjou than a wise ruler could undo. He chafed at the tight rein his older brother held him on, and his resentment was dangerous; but it would be worse to give him his head.

"I am playing a sharp game for high stakes, Pierre," Henry resumed. "I cannot tell even you what hangs on the turn of the dice. But to win I must be stronger than my foes. If my barons desert me because you, whom they hate, have slain one of them, I shall lose. I shall lose England, Normandy perhaps, Anjou and Touraine certainly. It means the end of all my high hopes, which you have labored so faithfully to fulfill."

"What must I do, master?" Pierre asked simply.

Henry laid a hand on his arm.

"Go into exile—this night. When Sir Hugo comes to me to demand revenge for his brother, I will say that I have banished you. In June or July I will send you word to go, secretly, to England. When I join you there, after my triumph over Stephen, then, by ——'s glory, I will see to it that my barons have no more power to weaken me!"

"How?" Pierre asked, his eyes gleaming.

"As soon as England is mine, I will fill my armies with common men—men from the City Guard of London, Oxford, Winchester, and other towns; professional soldiers like yourself, who owe fealty to no baron; and I will raze to the earth every castle not held by a man I can trust!"

"It is good!" Pierre approved. "But in the meantime, where shall I go? Exile means death to me. King Louis has forbidden me to set foot in his realm; Aliénor, his divorced queen, would have me slain if I entered her domain. Between them, those two and you, you hold all France save Champagne and the Languedoc. To reach either I must pass through Louis' lands or through Aliénor's duchies of Poitou and Aquitaine."

Henry smiled slyly.

"You will never leave Touraine," he answered. "I shall send you to Tours, with a messenger for the governor, who is faithful to me. He will keep you safe hidden till I send you safe-conduct to England. Thus you shall escape all danger, and at the same time serve me. In the letter to the governor I shall place another, which he will give to one who dwells within the city. This is a most important errand, which must not fail—lest it cost me more than Normandy."

Pierre began to gather his belongings.

"None will know of this?" he asked.

"None—save my clerk, whom I can trust. He is even now inditing the letters. You cannot send to the stables for your horse, lest your going be known; I will have a swift courser brought to the postern from my own stalls. The guard at the gate is one of your own men. You must leave within the hour."

Henry vanished into the dark corridor, and made his way swiftly to his own chambers. In the first of his three rooms, his clerk—a lean, pinch-faced man in the gown of a minor canon—was seated at a high desk, writing in a fine hand. Henry watched him a moment; then:

"One left my chamber as I came up, Gerald," he said. "His face was in the shadow. Who was it?"

The clerk started, his eyes blinking.

"It was Sir Hugo D'Orbec," he replied, in a dry whisper. "He came to lay a complaint before Your Grace."

Henry scowled.

"But he passed me by. Why did he not wait?"

Gerald had recovered his self-possession.

"Your Grace has said it was dark. Doubtless he did not know you."

"Belike," Henry growled. "You take long to finish a simple letter."

"Please, your Grace, there were two letters; and Sir Hugo delayed me."

It was the duke's turn to start.

"He did not see your writing?"

Gerald smiled wryly.

"That he did not, my lord."

Henry nodded, and summoned his squire from the inner room.

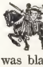
"Fetch me the sergeant Le Balafré from the postern!" he commanded. Bowing, the squire departed, staggering with sleep, and returned shortly with a tall, stocky soldier.

"Fetch the black stallion from my own stable, Balafré!" Henry ordered. "Bring him to the gate. Then resume guard. Deliver the black to him who comes to you with my name on his lips. You will know the man. Say nothing of this, or your head pays for it!"

As Balafré went off, the clerk finished his letters, and gave them to the duke to sign. Taking the pen from him, Henry scrawled his name and titles in an awkward hand, and himself sealed them. Then, placing them in a wrapper of oiled parchment, he sealed this also.

"Go with these to the postern, Gerald, and give them to Pierre Faidit. You shall hang if they go astray!"

Gerald drew a sharp breath, and his face seemed more pinched than ever. Bowing low, he slipped from the room.



IT WAS time for the dawn when Pierre rode down the castle hill with the duke's black courser between his knees; but the sky was black as a pall. An April storm had come up, bringing the soft, steady rain of spring. The roads would be heavy in an hour's time, too heavy for him to make swift work of the ride to Tours. He knew the duke wanted as much distance as possible between him and the court before it should be light enough for any to recognize him.

He dashed through the town guard at the outer port of Chinon with a shout:

"Duke's messenger! Delay me not, at your peril!"

But the duke's orders had been before him, and the gate swung open to pass him through ere he could check his pace. The black bounded out on the straight white road that runs like a bow-shot to Azay-le-Rideau on the way to Tours.

He had left Chinon well nigh an hour behind when the cloud-wrapped sky grew gray, and his beast, tossing its head in the teeth of a rising breeze, neighed shrilly. Pierre loosened his sword in the sheath, and felt of the saddle-bag on his shield-side, where the duke's letters lay. Slackening his pace, he rode on more carefully.

The minutes passed, and he heard nothing; nor were objects yet very clear in the half light. They grew dimmer still as he rode between the aisles of Chinon forest;

but knowing the road before him was straight, he pricked the black's flanks. The stallion shot ahead, gathering speed, flinging mud from his hoofs.

Suddenly Pierre felt something smite his breast and sweep him from the saddle. He flew, whirling, over his horse's rump, and crashed full length against the road. For the briefest instant voices sounded faintly in his ears; then he lost consciousness.

It was light when he roused again. He lay by the side of the road, a cluster of armed men standing over him. All wore masks over their helmets; their shields and surcoats were bare of any device. He strove to rise, but one of his captors thrust the point of a sword against his throat.

"Unhelm him, Gui!" ordered a hoarse voice, that was plainly disguised.

One bent down and tore off Pierre's helmet, which was still held in place by the lacings of his cheek-curtains. The man was none too gentle.

"*Peste!*" growled the leader. "It is the wrong man! Your pardon, good sir; we were after other game. Mount, lads!"

Leading their horses from a screen of undergrowth, the masked men sprang to the saddle. When Pierre rose, painfully testing his bruised limbs, they were already far down the road to Tours.

"Tours!" he meditated. "They speak true, then: they stopped me by mistake. I have no foes in Tours."

He stood in the middle of the road in a drenching downpour, his head still buzzing from the force of his fall. His horse was nowhere to be seen; his sword and scabbard were gone.

"They were not above plunder, then!" he mused. "But 'twill go ill with him I find wearing my sword in Tours!"

Glancing about him, he discovered the means of his capture: a rope stretched across the road between two trees, at the height of a mounted man's chest. He cut it with his dagger.

"I must walk to Tours, then!" he reflected bitterly, "and without the duke's letters! God grant they be not in the hands of his foes!"

But it was poor comfort that in any case they would not reach the ones for whom they were intended, and that the duke, in his own words, stood to lose more than Normandy if they failed to be delivered. He strode on in the rain, whose freshness revived him; but his head ached wretchedly. The extent of his loss, and the thought of its possible consequences, made him utterly miserable.

He had gone perhaps a hundred paces when a cry of joy burst from his lips. From a clump of alders protruded the rump of his horse, its tail twitching as it munched at the rich grass. He ran forward as fast as the mud and the weight of his armor permitted, and recaptured the beast, whose bridle was tangled in its forelegs. His saddlebags were still there. With trembling fingers he fumbled at the fastenings, got them undone at last, and plunged his hands into the left-hand pouch. His letters were safe! To make utterly sure, he drew out the packet and scanned it closely. It was the same, untouched, the very seal intact.

Rejoicing, he rode on, more charitably inclined toward those who had ambushed him. Had they not left him his horse and his precious burden? Ay, and had made excuse for their mistake, as gentlemen should. But then he thought of his sword, and his heart hardened. He would never forgive, never spare, the man who had stolen that which was dearer to him than all else save friends and honor.

It was high noon when he rode over the hills where the first site of Tours had stood, before the Romans moved it across the river. The clouds were scattering before the warmth of an ardent sun, which already kindled the blue river, swollen with spring floods, and the densely massed roofs and spires of the walled city beyond. It was a glowing jewel, that city, bright and many-colored, in a setting of rich valley and budding flowers—the heart of the garden of France. With a lighter heart he urged his horse across the single bridge that led to the great gate.

The guards eyed him askance, as well they might.

"Who is this that comes garbed in mud, with blood on his face and no sword to his side?" growled the officer of the watch.

Pierre judged it unwise to speak his name, seeing that he was supposed to be in exile. He drew from his pouch the packet with the duke's seal and flourished it under his challenger's nose.

One glance at the arms of his overlord, and the soldier became all courtesy.

"Will it please your Excellence to enter!" he cried. "Verily, we are honored to receive the duke's messenger. Your letters are to the governor?"

"So it appears," Pierre conceded. "And there is some haste about them."

The officer detailed four men to escort him under the frowning arch, with its jutting turrets; and through the ill-paved streets they passed in strange procession. The soldiers, eager to show their loyalty to the duke, strutted as if accompanying some grandee; and Pierre, conscious of his battered, befouled appearance, grinned to himself. A tail of curious lookers-on attached itself to them, growing as they advanced, till with their entrance on the wide grain-market a throng ran up from all sides to stare and fling questions. The escort waved the crowd back with their spears, shouting loudly for room for the duke's envoy; and so, a magnet for all the idlers in Tours, they drew up before the square-towered citadel, surrounded by gaping citizens ere they could dismount.

Through the press the soldiers elbowed, forcing a wide path for Pierre to follow. On the stone steps lounged armored men, just relieved by the change of guard, eying the buxom bourgeoisie with more attention than they gave even the duke's messenger. Before the embattled entrace a dozen more crossed pikes.

"PLACE for the duke's ambassador!" howled the escort; and the pikes grounded. Passing between them, Pierre made his way to the Salle D'Armes, where a clerk took his message. In a few moments the governor appeared.

He bowed.

"Sire Marc de St. Martin," he announced himself; and, in lieu of giving his own name Pierre handed him the sealed packet.

The governor, a tall, somewhat portly man, gazed at him with keen eyes.

"I have not yet heard your name," he said, courteously, but with emphasis.

"I know not whether my lord duke wishes it known, even to so true a vassal as the Sire Marc," Pierre countered. "If so, it will stand written in one of his letters, which concerns me. The other is for a person whose identity his Grace did not reveal to me."

Frowning, the governor scanned the superscriptions, and looked oddly at Pierre.

"It is strange," he said, "that the duke should make you his envoy without revealing to you the condition of the—the—person to whom this is addressed."

He broke the seal of his own letter, and read slowly, once and again. When he looked up, his eyes were hard.

"This does not tell your name," he spoke coldly, "but it does give strict commands concerning you. Be pleased to follow me."

He led Pierre out again to the entrance hall, and beckoned to a group of soldiers.

"Take this man," he ordered, "and put him in the dungeon of the North Tower!"

Pierre recoiled and clapped his hand to his side before he remembered that he had no sword. Before he could make a second movement, he was surrounded, seized and hurried away. He was borne swiftly to a wing of the stoutly built castle, dragged down a winding stair in a corner tower, and clapped into a filthy cell. Before leaving him, his captors stripped him of surcoat, mail, and dagger, and left him in his leather jipoun.

He thrust his face to the small, barred aperture in the solid, spike-studded open door, and called after the departing guards:

"What does this mean? Send the governor to me!"

Mocking laughter answered him, as the men-at-arms clattered up the stair.

Peering through the bars, Pierre inspected the vault that contained his cell. The place was hewn out of the solid rock on which the tower was built. It's walls, thick as they were, were damp and slimy. The paved floor was foul, and the air stale with mould. At first he thought himself alone in the dismal crypt, till he heard a groan from some cell near his own. The meaning of the sound was borne in upon him by the sight of a trough-shaped instrument longer than a man, fitted with cords, a windlass and metal wedges, and stained with blood.

His own quarters were comfortless and vile. There was not even a bench—no place to sit or lie save the stone floor, thinly covered with rotten straw. A single barred window high above his head let in a gloomy light from what must be a high-walled court. One side of the cell was hung with rusty chains, fast to the stone.

Pierre stood bewildered, trying to understand what had befallen him. Treachery? What ground was there? He had given the governor the letters entrusted to him. The duke had said that Sire Marc would find him a place of refuge, where he could lie close till he could make his way to England to renew his secret work for Henry there. And now—

He grinned wryly.

"Perchance this is the safe refuge?" he meditated. "I could wish the governor lodged his guests more cleanly!"

It was entirely possible that the duke's letter might have ordered Sir Marc to place Pierre in honorable confinement—under guard in respectable quarters—as the surest way of keeping him from the vengeance of his foes. But to treat him like a criminal, cast him into the most noisome dungeon in the city—that was unthinkable. Anger and despair struggled in his mind as he surveyed his surroundings. Such a fate as this was reserved for traitors.

Had Henry betrayed him? Was his master's friendship but a pretense, and the shame which had been done him in Chinon the true expressions of the duke's feelings toward him? His soul revolted against the thought. During the three years he had served Henry he had never, till a few weeks back, received aught but kindness and honor at the duke's hands; and well had he earned such honor. Yet now, without reason, he was hurled from favor into ignominious captivity. And was this the end? Might there not be worse to follow? He thought of the blood-stained rack and boot he had seen in the crypt, and shuddered.

Weary from his ride, still shaken by the fall of the night before and faint with lack of food, he leaned against the wall of his prison. He wanted to lie down, but a glance at the reeking straw dissuaded him. Dizzy as he was, his thoughts would not focus on his plight. One moment he was convinced of his lord's treachery, the next his mind raced from one improbable explanation to another. But always he came against the blank wall of the letters he had been given to deliver; he had handed them over intact as they had been put into his hands, the seals unbroken. They must represent Henry's will. The governor was the duke's faithful vassal—Henry had said so.

But what if he were not faithful after all? The man's face was honest, even noble; but in the possibility of his dishonesty lay Pierre's only hope of the duke's good faith. The puzzle was insoluble. After some hours, faint and exhausted, Pierre gave it up.

Then the warder came with food, sliding it through a narrow panel in the door. Pierre heard the wooden edges grate, and looked down to see a panikin and a loaf of bread in the straw. He snatched them up, ate and drank, and felt his strength return. As he was munching the last of the bread, a face appeared in the barred aperture of the door. Pierre looked up just as it vanished, but he caught sight of the silken sheen of a woman's hood. Low voices sounded in the crypt; the door screeched on its hinges, and three men-at-arms came in, points leveled at his breast.

As the men advanced, Pierre was compelled to back away before the threatening points till he stood at bay against the wall where the chains hung. One man slipped in, and, protected by the swords of the others, fastened the gyves about Pierre's hands and feet. They were cruel chains, so placed that they held his hands above his head and far apart, close to the stones. He could neither lie down nor stoop, nor touch one limb with another.

Then the woman came in. She was tall, slender, lithe as a cat, her big eyes blue and cold. Her gown, clinging skin-close above the broad, jeweled girdle, was of finest sky-blue silk. One moment she stared at Pierre, then threw back her hood from a glory of spun-gold hair.

"You!" she said in a voice like frozen music.

Pierre caught his breath.

"You!" he echoed. A cruel smile curled the woman's thin, red lips.

IT WAS Aliénor, Duchess of Guienne, Poitou, and Aquitaine —and, until King Louis divorced her, Queen of France. The sight of her called to Pierre's mind the death of his first lord, poisoned by her hands; his own banishment from the French kingdom, after he had exposed her guilt to the king, and so made possible the divorce that followed. And she was here, in Tours—in Duke Henry's realm!

His astonishment amused her.

"Welcome, Pierre Faidit!" she said with smooth irony. "It gives me pleasure that one so famed should be my guest."

"Your guest?" he repeated in confusion.

"Ay; why not? I have greatly longed for

this honor. After all your pains to spread my fame—my ill-fame, I fear—throughout France, your skill in disembarrassing me of a husband and a kingdom, should I not cherish the wish to reward you as you deserve? And now, thanks to your master, I have the opportunity."

She smiled with dainty irony, showing small, white teeth.

Pierre glared at her.

"My master? What mean you?"

"You do not know?" She shrugged her shapely shoulders. She was still beautiful as he remembered her, the most beautiful woman in Europe; but her face had grown hard with the years.

"You do not know, when you yourself brought his commands to me? See!" She took one hand from behind her back, holding out a sheet of parchment.

"Read it! You should be the first to know, since it concerns you so nearly."

With mocking solicitude she held the parchment before his eyes, close, that he might read. His eyes widened, first incredulously, then with rage and horror. Addressed to Aliénor, with all her titles and honors set forth at formal length, the letter was a proposal of marriage. It was signed with the hand and seal of Henry of Normandy.

Pierre choked.

"Impossible!" he cried hoarsely. "My lord would never—does he not know you for—"

She clapped her firm little hand over his lips, glanced round to see that the door was shut and laughed in his face.

"For a murderess, you would say? A poisoner? Ay, he knows. Why should he not, when you blazoned my name abroad for all France to scorn and hate? But he also knows me for the mistress of all the rich South, with lands and gold and men-at-arms such as few kings can boast. He wants these things, Pierre—perhaps as much as he wants me."

"You do not love him!" Pierre stammered.

"What matter, so he loves me—or my dowry? Ah, you think that he values you too much to marry a woman you hate, perhaps? What know you of statecraft? He wants more men and money to conquer England—and perchance a wife who will give him sons as bold, as unscrupulous, as himself!"

"You would never—"

"Ah, but I will! I am but a few weeks divorced, yet already two princes have bid for my hand. They were very great, very strong; but neither of them can match Henry Plantagenet. Our marriage will unite under one rule all the land from the Channel to the Spanish March, from Bordeaux to the Languedoc. I shall be lady of two-thirds France—ay, Queen of England!"

She threw back her dainty chin and laughed, a hard, metallic, yet very lovely laugh.

"And England I shall owe in large part to you, if men say true. It will amuse me to think of that when your head rots on the gate of Tours!"

"You would not dare!" Pierre flung back at her.

Her little teeth ground.

"Would I not? Who forbids me to slay you? Not Henry! See there!" She held a second parchment before his eyes. "This is the letter you brought the governor!"

Pierre read, and turned his eyes away, lest she see his misery. Stripped of its titles and pedantic phrase, the parchment bore to the governor the order to seize the bearer, cast him into bonds, and hold him at the disposal of the Duchess Aliénor, to do with as she would. There could be no doubt of its genuineness; Pierre instantly recognized the sprawling signature of his master.

Aliénor's sweet voice broke through his bitter thoughts.

"But a little more, and I will leave you to your meditations. They will be pleasant, I trust. I shall leave you here four days, that you may taste in full the knowledge that princes value their servants less than the least advantage they may buy. Then, when your reflections have sufficiently prepared you, I will have you gently hanged. I think there could be no better way to repay you for the scorn you have brought on me."

She was silent for a little, so that he thought she had gone. When he turned his head, he found her still gazing at him mockingly.

"Tell me, Pierre, has my beauty faded with the years?"

His eyes burned on hers.

"Nay," he groaned, "you are as fair as ever. In all things you are as you always were."

She swept him a low bow and went out. The guards, returning, freed his limbs again; but in the face of their weapons he could not have broken away from them, had he been mad enough to try. Nor indeed did he greatly care, now, for his life.

Till now he had had the strong man's love of life in more than ordinary measure. Fame, the taste of power, the sharp give and take of battle, had been as wine to him. In the friendship of his comrade Cercamon, in the trust and kindness of his lord, he had known joy that to him surpassed all else on earth. Nor was it prison and the threat of death that broke him now, but the certainty that his lord was false. Ay, false. Henry had sold him for a smile from the woman whose lands he coveted. There was no more truth nor loyalty in life.

Unheeding the filth that had revolted him before, he sank down on the straw. Four days he must live in this misery, four days of solitude with his torturing thoughts, before the hangman came to bring him the release of death. Truly Aliénor was wise in the ways of vengeance!

So he sat till the afternoon sun slanted its last rays through his window, lighting his prison for a few brief moments. It was then that another face, dark, narrow, leering, was thrust close to the bars of his cell. A harsh voice broke in on his wretchedness.

"Ha! Faidit! Have I not well paid the score between us?"

Pierre looked up, but his power of surprize was exhausted. He stared dully into the eyes of Hugo D'Orbec. The Norman laughed, withdrew his head, and held up to the bars something that glowed in the sun's rays—a burning, lambent ruby.

An answering gleam kindled in Pierre's eyes, and D'Orbec laughed again. The thing he held was the hilt of Pierre's sword.

"You slew my brother, dog of a fisherman! Now he laughs at you from hell! Men call you cunning, yet I have played with you as one plays with a child, and brought you to death. Think on me when you dangle in a noose!"

Pierre turned his back on the fellow; but his apathy enraged the Norman.

"Ha! So you do not care! But when you know how I befooled you— It was I and my men who stopped you on your way, and lulled your suspicions with a pretended excuse that we had taken the wrong man! While you lay senseless, I robbed you of your letters, giving you another packet in exchange; and you knew not the difference. If you but understood how cunningly the thing was contrived—"

Pierre cut the jeering voice short.

"You lie," he said dully. "What you say is impossible."

"Think you so? Impossible to forge the duke's seal, so that you should not see the deception? To counterfeit his hand well enough to beguile you and the governor both? Impossible for me, ay; but not for—the duke's clerk!"

"Gerald?" Pierre's tone was weary, but incredulous. "He is loyal."

"LOYAL? Thou fool! No man is loyal beyond his price. The price of Gerald's honesty was fifty gold crowns—a tidy sum, eh? But it was worth as much to avenge my brother. It was Gerald from whom I learned of Aliénor's presence here, Gerald who wrote and signed the forged letter, copying the duke's hand to perfection; and Gerald has access to the great seal. He drew up false and true alike, while you were waiting to take them. I and my men had but to have half an hour's start of you on the road."

Pierre looked up quickly, a strange light in his eyes.

"You speak of one forged letter," he said, in a strained voice. "But the letters I bore were two."

"Ay; the one to the duchess was on matters of state, higher matters than I dared meddle with. We made an exact copy of it, and when I took the true packet from you, I substituted the false. The duchess received a fair copy of that which the duke intended for her; but in place of the orders bidding the governor find you safe lodging, you bore him a message in Gerald's best style, commanding that you be given up to Aliénor. Her hate of you is common knowledge. I knew the death she would contrive for you would be worse than any I could deal; and thus you will die by my cunning while I run no risk of punishment for your murder. She will hang you certainly, perhaps torture you first."

Pierre thought a moment; then, suddenly, he burst into peal on peal of laughter. D'Orbec, hate in his eyes, stared at him.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "You are to

die, and you laugh? I have your precious sword, and you laugh?"

With difficulty Pierre restrained his mirth enough to speak.

"O fool, fool!" he mocked. "You would torment me, and against your will you bring me joy! Begone, that I may laugh my fill at thee!"

D'Orbec turned away, baffled and furious; but Pierre called him back.

"Hunt thyself a safe hole!" he cried. "When I am free, I will search thee out, take my sword from thee, and with it thy life!"

D'Orbec snarled at him.

"Thou canst not escape! The duchess knows she has me to thank for thy presence here, and has made me thy keeper. When thou leavest this cell, it will be on thy way to the gallows!"

Pierre began to stride up and down his cell, thinking. The letter to Aliénor was genuine: Henry had proposed marriage to her, knowing her for a woman wicked as she was beautiful. This was bad enough. But what had been worse, for Pierre, was proved false. His lord had not betrayed him; Henry had kept faith. Pierre's present plight was the work of a cunning rascal; and against such, though they had trapped him, he might find means to fight. He had won free from desperate straits before; he had uncommon strength and uncommon wit to draw on. And now—now that he knew his lord was innocent of wrong to him—life was worth fighting for. Joy flooded his heart, and with it came resourcefulness and vigor. Hugo D'Orbec had frustrated his own revenge.

But the walls of Pierre's prison were as stout, the door as staunch, as ever. And he was unarmed.

THE Lady Mathilde sat in her bower, her wise old eyes very bright as she looked at her two tall sons. She was proud of them both, in different ways, and with a pride that was void of all illusion. She knew them for what they were. Of the two, she loved Henry best. A life full of hardship, of vain struggle, that had aged her before her time, had given her a high regard for men who were men indeed. She loved Henry's strong body, his fierce pride that brooked no rivalry nor opposition, his hot temper and his hard hand. Geoffrey she loved for his courtly manners and his fair face; but her love for him was tinged with pity. Ay, he was cunning; he was not afraid; but there was an instability about him that reminded her of his father. Henry was his mother's child; and Mathilde had been a better man than most men of her day.

Henry gestured to a servant.

"Fetch Cercamon!" he commanded.

"He is here, my lord!" The troubadour's deep voice rang from the doorway.

"My mother would hear a song, lad."

Cercamon, taking the privilege of his profession, shook his head.

"I am not in the mood for song, my lord. What have you done with Pierre? One of his men has told me that you took away his captaincy. Now he is not here, and none knows whither he has gone."

Henry hated to be questioned.

"He is on my errands," he replied shortly.

"It is said you have banished him," Cercamon pursued relentlessly. "Why? For killing an assassin who would have murdered him? And where has he taken refuge? Is he safe?"

Henry stamped his foot, and the veins swelled in his temples; but Lady Mathilde checked his wrath.

"I see this is something you would keep hidden," she said bluntly. "Which of us do you mistrust? Geoffrey? Me? Cercamon you can not doubt, for you have always taken him into your counsels."

The duke was fairly caught, forced into the open. He could not confess, to Geoffrey's face, that it was his brother he mistrusted.

"Pierre has gone to Tours, then," he admitted. "With letters to the governor. See that ye say nought of it."

"And to—some one else in Tours?" Geoffrey thrust in slyly. Henry flushed.

"Seek not to know what does not concern you. Pierre is safe—by my order."

"That is well, my lord," Cercamon said slowly. "The castle rings with the tale of Ormeric D'Orbec's death, and Ormeric's snake of a brother will plot revenge. Are you sure Pierre is safe in Tours? Hugo D'Orbec is not here in Chinon, and his spies may learn more than they should."

Mathilde turned her dark eyes on the troubadour.

"Listen to that man, Henry. He is wise

—wiser than you or I. Do you know more than you have said, Cercamon?"

Cercamon shook his head.

"Not a jot, my lady. I only know that Pierre is not here, and that his enemy—who should be lurking near him to strike—is also gone. And that Pierre has been publicly rebuked by my lord, and shorn of his honors. All this looks suspicious. I know nothing more—but I smell evil. I also would go to Tours."

Henry started, and his hot eyes flashed.

"Not you, lad! Pierre is safe there, but you—you would not be!"

"It is said," Geoffrey observed blandly—but with a covert glance at his mother—"that he has an enemy who hates you also, troubadour."

Cercamon turned his blue-green eyes full on the boy, as if seeking to probe his heart.

"What mean you, lord Count?" he asked.

Mathilde cut in between them.

"He means nothing, save that he is a fool who will some day die of his folly! Play with the ladies, girl-face; men wear weapons."

Geoffrey turned scarlet, and rose with a stiff bow.

"If my lady mother, and the duke, my brother, will grant me leave, I will even do as she advises!" he said angrily. Henry nodded curtly, and Mathilde smiled. Geoffrey glided from the room, graceful as a woman. Out of the tail of one eye Cercamon saw him turn slightly at the door, and beckon.

"I crave leave to seek the ladies also," he said, with a smile; and followed the young count.

As the door closed behind him, Mathilde took Henry's hand in hers.

"Mischief is brewing there, boy!" she said. "So long as you cherish Pierre, Cercamon will follow you to the death; but if aught happens to his friend, 'ware Cercamon!"

Henry started to his feet, but his mother held tight to him.

"Nay, let them be, lest a worse thing happen! If you must question them, question them separately!"

"NOW, touching this matter of the ending of a *canzo*," Geoffrey spoke in a loud voice for the benefit of those who stood in the passage, "I hold that the last rhyme should vary, to give greater strength to the whole."

Cercamon eyed him meaningly. He knew that Geoffrey had some secret word for him; and it was for him to play his part in the game that masked that secret from curious ears.

"Strength can be attained by the wise choice of phrase in the line, my lord," he countered, "without ruining the harmony of the rhymes."

"Ruining? Nay! It is my belief—"

And so the fictitious argument ran on, while the two climbed the winding stair to the battlements. Goeffrey was too wise to feed his brother's suspicions further by a private conference with the troubadour in his own chamber. When they emerged into the clear, sweet night, Geoffrey summoned a spearman, a man of Anjou.

"We would speak apart," he said. "If you would keep my regard, Matthieu, let none come nigh us. And warn us if any man comes up the stair."

The spearman saluted.

"As my lord wills." He took his stand at some distance, between Geoffrey and the other sentinels, at a spot whence he could watch the stairhead.

"That man is devoted to me," Geoffrey whispered in the troubadour's ear. "Now we can speak plainly. Aliénor of Aquitaine is in Tours."

Cercamon started.

"It is worse than I feared, then," he said. "I was sure Hugo D'Orbec would dog Pierre's movements, waiting for a safe means to avenge his brother. But the duchess—are you sure?"

Geoffrey laughed bitterly.

"You are no fool, Cercamon. Use your wits. My brother suddenly removes his court from Caen, where he can watch England, to Chinon, where he has usually no great interests. Why?

"This happens but a week after the arrival of a swift courier from Paris, who immediately sought the duke. What had happened in Louis' kingdom to warrant the messenger's haste? Do not all men know that about that same time Aliénor was divorced from the French king? Being divorced, and being the woman she is, she would be ordered to quit France straightway after the divorce. She would then go home—to Aquitaine, or Poitou. The nearest and safest way would lead through Tours. And at this time—at this time, mark you, my lord brother drops his English intrigues and posts to Chinon—which is but four and thirty miles from Tours. Is it not plain?"

"Plain enough," Cercamon admitted. "But you do not know that she is in Tours? You but surmise it from the facts?"

Geoffrey snorted.

"I surmise it, and I know it too. I have my spies, though I can not pay them well, thanks to my brother's niggardliness." He broke off with a curse; then:

"Why can not my brother treat me like a man?" he burst out passionately. "Am I not older now than he was when he succeeded to the dukedom? Am I less wise than he? Yet, of all that he inherited from our father, he gives me but three bare castles! If I am to have honors, lands, money, I must find them for myself! And, thunder of heaven! If he will not give them me, I will find them!"

Cercamon said nothing, looking ostentatiously over the parapet; but his thoughts were busy.

Geoffrey's tone changed to one of kindly solicitude. He laid a hand fondly on the troubadour's shoulder.

"I know your affection for Pierre, my friend. He is a brave man, worthy your regard. I would give much to save him from harm. Now it is in my mind that he is in deadly peril at this moment. Henry knows of the hate Aliénor bears him—yet he sends him to Tours, where she is. What if she discovers his presence there?"

"He is doubtless under the duke's safe-conduct," Cercamon murmured.

"What avails a safe-conduct against poison, or a knife in the dark?" Geoffrey sneered. "May it not be that Hugo D'Orbec has followed him thither to wield that knife? Or to betray him to Aliénor at the least?"

Cercamon stirred uneasily. Geoffrey's dark hints tallied all too closely with his own fears.

"My lord," he said slowly, "you can never mean—or think—that the duke sent Pierre to Tours because he knew Aliénor was there—to be rid of him?"

Goeffrey cried out in shocked protest. "Never! Though it is true that the duke hath been most unkind to him of late. Yet I do not believe—"

Cercamon understood the cunning insinuation.

"Nay!" he objected. "It can not be. The duke is a hard man, but honest. I think he trusted to Pierre's shrewdness to keep him out of danger. Yet that there is danger if Aliénor learns of his coming, I can not deny. It is very bad that Hugo also has gone—perhaps to Tours."

Geoffrey, after a moment's hesitation, ventured a bold stroke.

"You are wise, Cercamon. You know Henry's ways. It is not his way to betray his servants. But it is ever his wont to seize what power he can. Do you not see why he has come here, where he can be so near Aliénor?"

Cercamon stared at him.

"You mean?"

"He means to ask Aliénor to marry him!"

"Ah!" Cercamon drew in his breath with a quick hiss. "You are right. It is clear. Evil woman though she is, she would bring him the richest dowry ever woman had. He would do it. Any wise prince would do it. It will more than double his power."

"But it will imperil his friends—such of them as Aliénor hates," Geoffrey hinted.

"Perhaps. But I think my lord believes himself man enough to master even such a wife, and compel her to leave his friends alone. I should have no fears for myself—after the marriage. But Pierre, in Tours, now—I see I must ride to Tours."

"Bide a little," Geoffrey interposed, "and I will ride with you."

"You? But my lord—"

Geoffrey nodded thoughtfully.

"I will tell you something, Cercamon. I need friends, and you will keep my secret. If Henry marries Aliénor, he will be the strongest man in France—stronger than the king. But if—if that should happen which would prevent such a marriage—"

"Stop, my lord!" Cercamon interrupted. "I can hear no more. What you have said I will not disclose to your brother; but I am his vassal, bound to him by the strongest ties of loyalty and regard. I will ride to Tours alone."

Geoffrey sighed.

"As you will. I am sorry, for you could have helped me—and I you. I fear greatly that your refusal will prevent me from saving Pierre in his dire peril."

"Peril—" Cercamon began; but the sentinel, grounding his pike with a loud clang, warned him to be silent. Hard on the man's signal Henry appeared at the stair top, his wide shoulders outlined against the light of a torch behind him.

"It grows late, lads!" he growled. "Best go to bed, brother. You are over young to watch so late."

The mockery in his words jarred on Geoffrey. Smothering a curse, he bowed low, and obeyed the scarcely veiled order. When he had gone, Henry took his place at the troubadour's side.

"What had he to say to you?" Henry demanded. "Nay, good Matthieu! Keep your distance! Overlong ears can be cropped, knave!" The spearman strolled off.

"Half the Angevins in the castle are Geoffrey's spies!" the duke complained. "And I am their ruler! A pretty pass, when a man's own brother plots against him!"

"You keep too tight a rein on him," Cercamon retorted. "Had you given him more power, he would be your loyal vassal."

Henry shrugged.

"Mayhap. I have been over-stingy with him. I will make amends, if it be not too late. But I did not think you would conspire with him against me."

Cercamon removed his belted sword, and handed it, hilt first, to Henry.

"I have not conspired, my lord, nor will I; but if your Grace doubts me, take my sword, and have me put in chains."

Henry's voice boomed in a hearty laugh.

"Nay, lad, I trust you, but I am out of humor over this affair of Pierre's. I sent him to Tours, as I said, with a letter to the governor, which should ensure his safety. It had to be done. I gave out that he was banished; partly because my barons would deny me their homage if I failed to act after Ormeric's death, and partly because Pierre's own life was in danger from them. If I had more money, I could buy their loyalty. They are all for sale. But I have spent all I have buying the support of the English lords in preparation for the coming invasion."

"And so," Cercamon put in boldly, "you plan to raise more money by marrying the Duchess Aliénor?"

Henry stared at him.

"You got that from Geoffrey!" he growled.

"It is plain from the facts themselves," Cercamon answered lightly. "Here are you in Chinon; there is she in Tours. And—Pierre—is—in—Tours! I mean to go thither myself, my lord!"

"No harm can come to him," Henry persisted stubbornly. "The governor—"

"Where is Hugo D'Orbec?" Cercamon countered.

"Ha! I understand! But how—"

"My lord, Pierre is my brother-in-arms. His danger demands my aid. Give me a letter to the governor, bidding that he obey me in all things as your deputy. If D'Orbec should get word to the duchess concerning Pierre, she is cunning enough to find ways of destroying a man she hates so bitterly. Knowing her, and armed with your letter, I can defeat any plans she may have against him."

Henry thought hard, rubbing his foxmane with stubby fingers.

"If D'Orbec betrays him to her," he pondered, "and she strikes against him; if then you present my order for his safety—she will be angered against me—and my plans for a marriage—"

"Would you sell your friends for political advantage?" Cercamon shot at him.

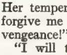
"By the mass! You take too much on yourself, troubadour! Do you dare—"

"For my friends I dare anything, my lord, even as in the past I have dared many things in your service. If I were not true to him, how could I be true to you?"

The duke's anger melted, swiftly as it had arisen.

"I will give you the letter," he decided. "In the last extremity it will save Pierre. But you are a man of shrewd parts. If you can save him without imperiling my suit for the duchess's hand—and that means without using my letter—you will save me from a ruin as great as ever befell a prince! Her temper is such that she would never forgive me if I forced her to give up her vengeance!"

"I will try," Cercamon promised. "I pray you, let me have the letter soon, for I would ride tonight."



"HE WHO rides fast rides to a fall," muttered Cercamon to himself, as the watch-fires on the crest of Chinon Castle died to yellow patches against the night. The town was well behind him, the highroad before, and a good—but not a handsome—horse between his knees. He had stolen away as secretly as possible; yet, though his anxiety for Pierre tugged at his nerves, he reined his mount in to a dog-trot, his ear inclined down-wind to catch the least sound.

"The road is empty," he decided, and dismounted. By the wayside he tethered his horse, doffed mantle and spurs, and weighting them with a stone, flung them far into the undergrowth. From a bundle at his saddle-bow he took a shapeless garment, the cowled gown of a canon of St. Martin de Tours which he had purloined from the duke's chaplain, and put it on over his armor. He stood thus in the dark, fumbling at his scabbard to make sure that his short, broad, two-edged sword was wholly hidden by the skirts of his cassock, and smiled to himself. Adjusting the cowl so that it concealed his long locks and almost masked his eyes, he gathered the long gown and carefully mounted.

The morning sun bathed Tours in crimson fire as he rode into the city, troubled at heart, but eyes afire with the joy of action. His ready brain worked best against odds, and here was promise of odds enough. Pierre might be safe, but the chances were against him in a city that held Aliénor of Aquitaine for guest.

Cercamon did not mean to use Henry's all-powerful letter in any way that would compromise his lord's plans. It would suffice to free Pierre from anything but a coffin, but only at great cost to the duke. Having incurred Aliénor's hate himself, the troubadour knew she would sacrifice even a most advantageous marriage to satisfy her vengeance against one who had offended her as bitterly as Pierre. Therefore Cercamon resolved to have full resort to his letter only if all else failed, and first to try the full resources of his own crafty mind.

His religious habit won him entrance past the guard, who were just opening the city gates. At his request a soldier guided him to the citadel, where he cooled his heels for an hour before the governor rose. Once announced, however, he was admitted without difficulty into the governor's presence.

He at once delivered his letter.

"If I mistake not, my son," he began, speaking in character with his religious garb, "a message has already reached you from the duke our lord."

The governor nodded.

"But three days ago, holy father. I obeyed the orders it contained."

"Then you behold here the authority by which I question you concerning them. I have leave to speak?"

"Assuredly, father. This letter commands me to obey its bearer in all things, as the accredited representative of the duke."

Cercamon's heart was considerably lightened. The governor had obeyed Henry's first letter, which had commanded that Pierre be placed in safety.

"The man who came to you is out of harm's way?" he asked.

Sir Marc smiled grimly.

"As safe as a man can be behind stone walls. Whatever he has done to offend the duke, he will sin no more."

Cercamon started.

"To offend? Stone walls? What mean you?"

It was the governor's turn to be surprized.

"I received orders," he explained, "by the letters which the fellow carried, to cast him into prison. I did so. My dungeons will keep any man harmless. To make all sure, he hangs tomorrow morning!"

His previous words had warned the troubadour that all was not well; nevertheless it was with difficulty that Cercamon concealed his consternation.

"I think," he said uneasily, "I think, my son, that you have not fully comprehended the duke's will concerning this man. May I ask you to show his letter to me?"

Over-sensitive on the point of honor, the governor rose stiffly.

"I regret that I have given the letter to the Duchess of Aquitaine, whose affair it seemed to be," he answered. "But I assure you there was no mistake. I make no mistakes of that sort. The letter clearly bade me cast its bearer into prison, subject to the duchess's will. I did so."

Cercamon's worst fears were realized. Nonetheless, warned by his mistake of the moment before, he bowed.

"I crave your pardon, my son. The mistake was not yours, but her Grace's."

"That is a matter for you to discuss with her Grace. I will inform her of your coming."

Cercamon held up one hand.

"That you must not! I give you my word, my son, that it would peril the duke's interests on which I have come. He has entrusted me with a task so delicate that the smallest misstep would cost him dear. If you would serve him, let me come before the duchess unexpected and unannounced."

The governor was impressed.

"A strange pother this, over a single soldier," he mused. "Yet I marked that he wore fine mail, as if he were one in authority. May I ask his name?"

"Surely, if you will not repeat it. He is Pierre Faidit, whom men call Pierre of the Sword."

Sir Marc's face for the first time betrayed uncertainty. He tugged nervously at his mustaches.

"I trust," he said anxiously, "that my zeal to obey my lord's commands—"

"Be at ease, my son. I shall report to the duke that you have in all things punctually obeyed the orders you had from him."

The governor bowed.

"My thanks, good father. If you would see the duchess, she lodges in the north tower."

"And the prisoner?"

"In a cell of that same tower, all of which is assigned to her Grace."

"In what force did the duchess come to Tours?"

"Four knights and twenty men-at-arms."

Cercamon reflected.

"Then, with your permission, I will see the prisoner first. After which—if I may have a chamber as close as possible to the north tower, and a trusty man to attend me, who will not speak of what he sees?"

Sir Marc smiled a puzzled smile.

"You shall have my own squire. He can neither read nor write, and he is by nature a silent man. Ho! Bruyn!"

A short, stocky soldier entered, very quietly. He was mailed, but bare-headed, and a shock of black hair framed his square, swarthy face.

"THIS priest," the governor explained, "has come on an errand for the duke. He is to come and go as he likes, and to command your services at all times, in all things. Understood?"

The soldier fixed his keen eyes on Cercamon and nodded. The troubadour, with a gesture of benediction, commanded to be led to the dungeons of the tower. But in the doorway he turned.

"It may chance, Sir Marc," he said meaningly, "that I shall need to issue certain commands which it would be best you did not know of, that you may disavow them if any question you. I shall issue them in your name, and expect to be obeyed; but, being ignorant of them, you may deny them afterward with a clear conscience."

The governor stared after his broad back in uncomprehending astonishment.

"A strange priest, that!" he muttered. "Yet his letters—"

Cercamon's own thoughts raced as he followed the squire Bruyn across the wide, rough-paved bailley. Pierre's letter to Sir Marc—there was foul play there! But how? The governor was clearly innocent. It was unthinkable that the duke had betrayed Pierre. Had he given him a *lettre de cachet*, it would account for Pierre's fate—but Henry would never have done such a deed. Nor, had he done so, would the duke have given Cercamon such plenary power to investigate. Somehow, after the letter had left the duke's hands, it must have been tampered with. But by whom? Gerald, the clerk, was surely honest. Cercamon gave the problem up, yet he praised the Saints that he had written with his own hand the authorization Henry had given him, seen the duke sign and seal it and taken it at once from his master's hands. Cercamon suspected no one; but he let no third hand mingle in his affairs if he could help it.

He had not expected to find Pierre lightly enough guarded to warrant a bold attempt at rescue. Descending to the crypt in Bruyn's wake, he was confronted, at the foot of the stair, by a half-dozen soldiers, armed to the teeth. Behind, and a little to one side, stood Hugo D'Orbec.

Cercamon was not surprized. He had been sure, before leaving Chinon, that any harm which might have overtaken Pierre was of this man's contriving. Nor did he flatter himself that D'Orbec would be easy to outwit. He could not show the Norman his letter from the duke—such a course would at once result in an open breach between Aliénor and his master.

He was glad that the semi-darkness of the crypt aided his disguise. Adjusting his cowl the better to conceal his eyes, he asked in a deep voice:

"Your leave to see the prisoner, my son!"

The Norman pointed to the row of cells.

"He is there, father," he smiled, "but I do not think you will see him. The duchess has ordered that he be allowed to speak with none."

"But surely spiritual consolation—"

D'Orbec shook his head, with unconcealed delight.

"He is to die without absolution and without the sacrament."

Cercamon gasped, in consternation at the brutality that would condemn a man to perish with all his sins on his head. D'Orbec naturally interpreted his emotion as that natural to a priest outraged in his most sacred feelings.

"It is not by my order, father," he explained, "but by her Grace's. Not that I—"

Cercamon nodded, and withdrew up the stair, the governor's squire keeping pace with him in utter silence. The troubadour had noted one thing that meant much: Four of D'Orbec's men were his own vassals, men Cercamon had seen in Chinon. The other two wore the livery of Aquitaine. D'Orbec was, then, definitely in Aliénor's service and doubtless high in her favor. The situation was bad indeed; even if a plan could be contrived, the Norman would die rather than let his enemy slip from his hands. What must be done could be done only through Aliénor herself; and knowing her, Cercamon had scant hope.

"Where is my chamber?" he questioned.

The silent Bruyn halted him at the landing, which gave on a corridor running west from the tower, and pointed to the left; then held up three fingers.

"The third room west of the tower?" Cercamon asked, and the other nodded.

"And where does the duchess lodge?"

The squire turned as if to lead him up the second flight of the winding stair; but Cercamon held him back.

"Nay, it is as well you should not be seen with me near her quarters. As guide to a priest you are not an object of suspicion, but as guide to— Take these!"

He whipped off his cassock, and stood there in full mail; then, stripping away belt and sword, he placed the whole in the squire's hands.

"Hide them under your cloak!" he commanded. "Take them to my chamber, and hide them there. It will be enough to tell me how I may reach her Grace."

Bruyn rolled astonished eyes at him, and spoke in the swift, curt manner of a taciturn man:

"The next landing. To your right—the second door."

"Good. Now go—and wait in my chamber till I come."

The man went swiftly, and as swiftly Cercamon climbed the stair. Emerging on a broad corridor, he found himself halted by three men-at-arms on duty at the landing.

"Governor's orders!" he barked at them, praying that none of them had been in Aliénor's service long enough to remember the days when he had sung in her court.

They passed him through, and he strode to the second door, at which stood a brace of sharp-featured Gascons, none too busy with their watch to bandy jests with a pretty maid-of-honor. They sprang to bar his way just as an officer clattered up the stair and demanded entrance. The men-at-arms parted to let the officer by, and Cercamon leaped in at his heels.

He closed the door behind him, set his back against it, and smiled into the astonished officer's face. He trusted his cast-off disguise was still a secret. A monk had stood on the landing below; and now a courtier in armor, weaponless and so not dangerous, stood, debonair and self-reliant, in the midst of an angry group.

The officer fronted him, hand on sword, while the Gascon guards pushed at the door. A red-faced clerk bustled up, protesting:

"You must knock! None enters her Grace's lodging unknown and unannounced! Such insolence—"

Cercamon, ignoring the knight, turned his blue-green eyes on the clerk. Cold and arrogant, he carried an air of authority that brooked no denial. The clerk cowered, used as he was to be bullied by men of rank; but he stood his ground, and the knight eased out his sword. The clerk edged over to a door giving on an inner room, and set his back against it. Two ladies-in-waiting directed shocked and curious glances at the intruder.

CERCAMON bowed ironically, his long locks brushing the officer's face.

"I am a guest," he said with a ripple of laughter, "whom her Grace will receive with joy. Say to her that Cercamon the troubadour craves an audience."

At the name of one whom all France knew for the duchess's enemy, the clerk paled, and one of the ladies uttered a little scream. The officer gently set his point to Cercamon's breast and stood waiting. But the younger of the two women, readier of wit, darted to the clerk's side.

"Open the door, Master Estienne!" she cried. "Nay, open, fool! And do you, Sire Golfier, sheath your weapon. Her Grace will indeed bless the day that brings her such a guest!"

The clerk turned to fumble at the latch; but the sprightly lady thrust him aside and flung the door open wide. Then, turning to let her dark eyes rest mockingly on Cercamon, she curtsied to the very floor, and cried in a ringing voice:

"My lady! An audience—for Cercamon!"

A cry came from the inner room. With a clank of steel, two armed guards burst into the antechamber and laid hands on the troubadour's shoulders, while the knight Golfier slipped nimbly behind him. Between them he advanced, helpless, but very much at his ease, into the presence of the woman who had once put a price on his head.

He bowed before her as gallantly as the clutch of his captors permitted.

"My eyes have been denied the sight of perfect beauty since I left your service, my lady," he said, with a conviction that drove the anger from Aliénor's eyes. "Now they are blessed again. You inspire me to a song that men will sing when I have become dust."

The duchess swept him a low courtesy.

"Loose him, messires!" she commanded. "There is neither purpose nor wisdom in holding captive a man unarmed—whose master's anger is more perilous than many swords."

"Your Grace is magnanimous as ever," the troubadour smiled. She felt the mockery, and swept him with a swift, challenging glance.

"Why not? I know full well it were dangerous to lay hands on you. You are Henry Plantagenet's man; I am in his territories. There is no man in his realm whom he values as highly as he does you. You knew I should not dare harm you, or you would not have placed yourself in my power. Is it not so?"

"Even so, your Grace. It is true that my master knows I am here, and expects me back—soon. Moreover, I have taken certain precautions with respect to the governor, who would be likely to search for me if I do not return to him within the hour. I do not trust myself rashly in my enemies' hands."

Aliénor bit her lip.

"Have you come merely to remind me that we are enemies, sir?"

Cercamon smiled winningly.

"Not so, madame. The enmity between us has been my misfortune, not yours. I come to atone for my old offense against you—to give your Grace a great gift."

Aliénor's fine blue eyes widened to the full.

"What gift can you give me—and—on what terms?"

Cercamon laughed aloud. It was pleasant to fence with this woman, now that his favor with Duke Henry made the pleasure a safe one. Had she not feared the duke and desired to please him, Cercamon would as soon have trusted himself with a viper as with Aliénor.

"You have a prisoner," he answered easily, "whom I would ransom."

Aliénor turned one shapely shoulder on him, and spoke with the guards.

"Leave us alone!" she commanded. "Do ye also depart, ye women!"

One of the soldiers protested:

"Your Grace is not safe with this man—"

Aliénor stamped one tiny, satin-shod foot.

"Be off!" she cried. "Think you I stand in any danger from a troubadour and gallant gentleman?"

Sullenly the guards withdrew, the women after them; and long were the glances the ladies-in-waiting cast in Cercamon's direction as they left the room.

"I thank your Grace," Cercamon said softly, "for that title of gentleman, which my birth scarce deserves."

The duchess smiled enchantingly.

"You are a gentleman by nature, which is better than the nobility of birth. Being a queen has taught me much, and not all of it pleasant— But you say I have a prisoner?"

"So I am told, your Grace. One who is my friend." He did not smile now; his eyes were grave, but full of confidence.

Aliénor nodded, tapping thoughtfully with her slipper.

"You mean?" she parried.

"Pierre Faidit. You mean to have him hanged tomorrow."

Aliénor turned her eyes to his, but he could read nothing in them.

"You are come, then," she spoke with forced calmness, "to say to me that Henry of Normandy, your master and Pierre's, demands his release? Yet the duke, in a letter signed with his own hand, gave Pierre to me!"

Cercamon noted the thin line of her lips, and understood that she would never give Pierre up alive. He had scarce hoped a more favorable outcome of his interview. He must seem to yield to her, if he would find a way to outwit her purpose.

"I think that letter was forged," he said calmly, "and I think you know it. But in any case my lord does not demand his release. Indeed, he bade me do nothing that would hazard his—friendship for you."

Startled out of her calm, Aliénor confirmed his suspicions of the letter.

"He knows I have Pierre, then?" she exclaimed. "And he will not force me to surrender him?"

"He suspects you have him, and prefers to do nothing that will displease your Grace. For my part, Pierre is my friend—but the duke is my lord. Even to save my friend I would hesitate to use the duke's name for a purpose that would cost him your—"

Aliénor laughed, a most musical laugh, like the song of a bird.

"My friendship, I believe you said. Ah well, troubadour, there is no need of concealment between us. We have been foes too long for that. Henry would save his servant from me if he could, but prefers not to risk my displeasure by demanding him, lest I refuse his offer of marriage. Is not that it?

"That is my meaning."

"And you—you are shrewd, Cercamon, but you do not deceive me. I warrant you have come with full power from the duke to do whatever may be necessary for Pierre's freedom, even at the cost of my—friendship; but you and Henry are both resolved to keep both your friend Pierre and my consent to this marriage. Bah! I can read you. You are not the man to betray a friend; nor is Henry that kind of master. I should care little for him if he were. You have come here with a plan—a clever trick. Tell me—what is it?"

"What trick would avail against one who can so shrewdly read men's minds?" Cercamon evaded. "Have I not said that I come with a gift—a great gift—to give in ransom for Pierre?"

This time Aliénor laughed scornfully.

"What gift have you that can buy my revenge? What can you, a troubadour, offer the mistress of the richest provinces in France?"

"Something that not all your wealth can buy, lady. Safety!"

THE duchess sprang to her feet, her chiseled nostrils dilated.

"Safety? Ah, I understand! I had scarce left Paris, but three days freed from him who had been my husband, when Thibault of Champagne sent horsemen to seize me. Now that I am free to marry again, every noble in France covets my lands—ay, my lands, not my beauty! I escaped from Thibault and sought refuge here. Who seeks me now? Am I not safe in Tours, surrounded by Henry's garrisons?"

"You are not safe here, nor anywhere but in your own lands," Cercamon replied meaningly. "As you say, every great lord in France desires your lands and your beauty, and will hazard all to win them. It chances that I know—and for a price, will tell—the danger that threatens you. Unless you yield what I ask, you will be carried off—ay, from Tours itself—to become the wife of a man without lands, almost without title. Your Grace knows—

Aliénor eyes blazed.

"Ay, I know! All France will laugh if I, who have been Queen of France, am forced into a marriage with one who can bring me neither lands nor coronet! Tell me—who threatens me? How may I escape? How know I that you speak truth?"

"Your Grace has called me a gentleman," Cercamon retorted. "On the honor of a gentleman, I speak truth. Now, touching your prisoner—"

She cut him off with an imperious gesture.

"Not that! Tell me, and I will give you your weight in gold; but for no price on earth—no, not to save my life, would I give up my vengeance on Pierre of the Sword! Your own offense is as nothing beside his. It was he whose accusations cost me the crown, cost me the respect of men, made me a byword for hissing throughout France! By my soul, he shall hang for it!"

"His accusations—" Cercamon began.

"Were true? Ay, what if they were? Did he injure me the less for that? Ask not for his life—I would not give it for my hope of heaven!"

Cercamon's head bowed, his face dark with despair.

"I have done what I could," he said heavily. "You will bear witness to that. The knowledge I possess may still be yours for a lesser price. If you will not forego your revenge, at least mitigate it. I have been told you have denied Pierre a priest. Is it not enough to hang him, without sending him to —— with all his sins unshriven on his head? Grant him the last ministrations of the church, and I will tell you the danger in which you stand. It is not yet too late to avert it, though time presses."

Aliénor pondered, her lips twitching with her emotion. At last she smiled, a hard, bitter smile.

"He shall have a priest," she agreed. "But you are a shrewd man, famous for your skill in snatching your desire from the very jaws of death. I will trust no priest you furnish. Pierre shall be shriven by my own chaplain; and I think you will find him no easier to move than me."

"It is enough, your Grace. I have your word?"

"Not my word only, which I have been known to break." She said this frankly, with a dazzling flash of her blue eyes. "Not my word only, but my oath by the Five Wounds, which I dare not break. But lest you hope to effect a rescue, the priest shall not go to him till one hour before he dies."

Cercamon bowed.

"Now for my part of the bargain, my lady. If you do not leave this city very soon, you will fall into the hands of Geoffrey of Anjou!"

The duchess started.

"Geoffrey? That boy? The duke's brother?"

"Ay, that boy. He is desperate with the harsh treatment—well deserved though it be—that Henry has given him. Neither lands nor men—not even money—can he get from the duke. But there are those who follow him, in the hope that they can overthrow Henry and make Geoffrey duke in his stead. Our turbulent barons know well that the boy would make an easier ruler than his stern brother. Therefore I bid you flee from Tours as fast as you may. Geoffrey has told me just enough to make me sure he plans to seize you, and make himself great with your inheritance. How would you fare then, the enforced bride of a penniless, landless lad? How greatly would you regret the folly that deprived you of all marriage to Henry would bring you. For Henry is not only lord of all the Northwest—he will one day be King of England!"

Aliénor's little hands were clenched; but the calculating lines of her forehead showed she was thinking desperately.

"You know he will come soon?" she questioned. "Surely he can not find men enough to storm Tours?"

"I do not know how swiftly he will come—but, having betrayed his plan to me without winning my help, he will strike very soon, for fear I will reveal his secret. He dares not wait long, lest Henry learn of it. If he does as I should do in his place, he will slip quietly out of Chinon with such men as he can trust, gather his garrisons from Loudun and Mirebeau and ride at once for Tours. There are many in Touraine who will join him once his banner is raised. He may be on his way hither now—and with a force that the city can not resist; and he has certainly friends within the walls. Unless he is a fool, he has every chance to win. I myself could devise a dozen plans for snatching you from the very presence of the governor."

He meant this to frighten her; and he saw that he had succeeded.

"Then—I must go tonight!"

"I think so, my lady. And go warily, lest he ambush you on the road to Poitiers."

Aliénor's eyes were troubled.

"For this great service I thank you, troubadour. You have given me much, and have received little in return. Your friend shall have his priest. Now go, for I have much to do if I am to ride tonight!"

But Cercamon stood motionless, till Aliénor turned on him impatiently.

"Pardon, my lady. I would feel safer if I heard you command your chaplain to attend Pierre."

"Ha! True! If I ride tonight, Pierre must hang tonight, lest I be cheated of my revenge."

She clapped her hands, and her women hurried into the room.

"Fetch Father Ambrose!"

Cercamon waited stolidly till the priest appeared: a short, pursy man, black-gowned, with a square, hard-lined face. In his eyes burned the flame of the zealot, pure of heart, inflexible of purpose. To him Aliénor gave her signet ring, with the command that he shrive the prisoner within the hour, and transmit her order that he be hanged as soon as shriven.

"I commend your altered purpose, my daughter!"

The priest spoke in pure Gascon, and Cercamon's heart warmed to him, remembering his own ragged boyhood in Gascony. Hastening to his chamber, he found the taciturn Bruyn waiting with curious eyes. From him Cercamon took his short sword, and girded it on.

"Now, my lad, I have orders for you!" he spoke briskly. "You know me for Henry's man; perchance you know not I am Cercamon the troubadour."

Bruyn's face lighted. He had heard of Cercamon—as who in France had not?—and was ready enough to serve one so famous.

"WHAT I bid you do will peril your soul and mine, yet not so much but that we may have absolution. If you disobey, I will see to it that your head parts company with your shoulders. Do you understand?"

It needed not the fire in Cercamon's blue-green eyes to win the squire's eager nod. He knew the repute of the troubadour's sword-arm.

"It will comfort you to know that you stand to win the duke's favor and my friendship—and mayhap much gold. You are to lie in wait in the passage just above the door to the crypt, and seize the duchess's confessor. Take him swiftly, lest he cry out. Bind and gag him if you will; it will make less trouble. Hide him so securely that none can find him, and do not set him free till I have left Tours. Bring me his gown and the ring he wears. If you fail—"

The squire's reticence melted under stress of fear and admiration.

"By the mass, good sir! I shall not fail!" he stammered.

"Then, my lad, I shall see to it that you have a brilliant future," Cercamon smiled meaningly. "But be sure he does not cry out!"

The squire vanished, and Cercamon sat down to wait the outcome of his plot. The minutes dragged interminably, till he could bide still no longer, and paced the floor with nervous strides. He reckoned it close to the allotted hour at the end of which Pierre must die, before his door stealthily opened and Bruyn glided in. Under his cloak was wadded the priest's black gown; between thumb and forefinger he held the carved ruby that was the duchess's signet.

"He is safely bestowed," he whispered, "in the chamber next this. I have the key. He made no noise. Saints, but I am afraid!"

"No need, now I have these." Cercamon compared the priest's gown with that of the monk of St. Martin in which he had come to Tours, and smiled faintly. The gray habit of St. Martin would not serve him now. He put on the cassock of Father Ambrose and strode to the door.

"Follow me. When I descend into the crypt, do you stand by the door. If you hear sounds of fight, stand fast, and refuse to pass any who would go down to interfere. Kill if you must, but pass no one—not even the duchess. Say the governor forbids it."

"But if the governor himself—"

"He lodges at the other end of the castle, and can not come till I have done what I came to do. But tell no man Cercamon is here. The duchess knows, but she will scarce speak of it. I will take the responsibility on my own head."

The two hastened down the corridor to the massive door of the crypt, Cercamon with his cowl pulled far down over his forehead. At the entrance he thrust Bruyn back, laid a finger to his lip, and descended the damp stone steps.

Sir Hugo D'Orbec and his six men-at-arms waited at the foot of the stair. Cercamon held up the duchess's signet, and D'Orbec nodded sullenly.

"It is her Grace's will that he be shriven," Cercamon spoke, in a tone as like the priest's as he could counterfeit. "When I have done with him, take him out and hang him."

Hugo hung back, muttering.

"He was to die without the sacrament," he protested. "Why trouble with such a dog?"

"Would you peril a mortal soul?" Cercamon asked sternly. "Her Grace has relented. Open swiftly now, for the duchess rides tonight, and her going must not be delayed. Already her horses wait at the gate."

The guards darted surprized glances at one another. Unwillingly D'Orbec fitted a heavy key in the clumsy lock and the door opened with a whine of rusty hinges. Then Cercamon had cause to rejoice at the feeble, flickering light cast by the two torches of the guard; for outside their radiance the huge crypt was a black well of darkness, and his own figure, between the Norman and his followers, threw D'Orbec into deep shadow. Letting the wide sleeve of his gown touch D'Orbec's arm, even as the door moved, Cercamon slid his fingers cunningly over the Norman's hilt—the hilt of the great sword stolen from Pierre. Then, thrusting hard with his free left hand, the troubadour flung his foe backward with all his strength, jerking at the hilt with his right. D'Orbec crashed back among his men, who raised a shout of alarm; but ere they could act, Cercamon was inside the cell, and thrust Pierre's sword into his hand.

"Out, comrade!" he cried. "Out, and strike for freedom!"

"Cercamon!" Pierre's voice rang trumpet-clear with joy and ardor. He leaped through the door even as the soldiers rushed to close it; and on the instant Cercamon, short sword out, was at his side with whirling blade.

D'Orbec, disarmed, hung back behind his men; and these were in no wise eager for fight. They were still confused; and strong habit made them slow to strike at a priest's gown. But Hugo, wresting a sword from one of his followers, flung himself forward.

"Fools!" he bellowed. "Did ye not hear? It is no priest, but Cercamon the troubadour! He has betrayed us! Cut him down!"

Still they hung back; for they knew it was not good to exchange blows with two such splendid swordsmen. Pierre and Cercamon took advantage of their hesitance to leap for the stair. They might have made it, had not Pierre had a debt to pay. He turned at the lowest step, his eyes on Hugo.

The Norman snarled at his men, who moved forward uncertainly.

"It is not good to slay a troubadour!" one shrilled. "They are under the protection of princes! The duke—"

One of the Aquitanians rushed forward with an oath.

"The duchess has put a price on this one!" he roared. "She will assure our safety. Slay!"

Under this urge the spearmen charged, and the two comrades awaited them, calm and confident. Pierre struck first, his great sword flashing in the torchlight like a monstrous gem. His first blow drove the helmet from D'Orbec's head. The Norman stepped back in sudden fear, but Pierre thrust home under the chin, and stretched his foe dead on the stones.

Four of the spearmen drove in doggedly, their long weapons at disadvantage between the columns of the crypt; while their two comrades held the torches for them to fight by. Pierre, bestriding the dead Hugo, made his whirling blade serve as weapon and shield both. While he fought for his life, Cercamon skipped passed a plunging point and knocked the torch spinning from the hand of one of the light-bearers. As he did so, an Aquitanian drove his point full against the troubadour's breast. The fine mail checked its force, but the keen steel tore a gash over his breast-bone. Swinging short, Cercamon cut away the point of the spear. The soldier, raising his lopped shaft like a quarter staff, struck down at his adversary's chin; but Cercamon warded and countered with a slash that shore away the man's arm. In that moment Pierre, having felled his second opponent, lashed at the second torchbearer. Darkness swallowed them.

"Pierre! The stair!" cried Cercamon, lunging out to keep his foemen clear. He sprang up three steps and waited, while the crash of wildly swinging blades, now against steel, now grating on the stone pillars, ground in his ears. There came the ring of blade on blade, a groan; and a great figure hurtled against him, bowling him over. He struggled up, shortening his sword for a thrust; but a voice rasped—

"It is I, comrade!"

The two stumbled up the stair together, the blind chase blundering after them, mail clanking as men slipped on the damp stone. Angry shouts lifted in wild cries for the guard. Then the fugitives struck the door and flung it outward, landing full sprawl in the lighted corridor.

As they picked themselves up, a third figure stood beside them. It was Bruyn.

"None came!" he growled. "Ye struck too fast. But—ha!"

As he cried out, the squire stepped nimbly round them and lashed out with his point at the stair-head. One of D'Orbec's men, caught in full stride, clattered headlong down the stair with his breast pierced through. The three who remained, Normans all, saw themselves matched and held back; but their yells echoed deafeningly down the corridor.

Other cries answered them from the inner court, where Aliénor's men-at-arms were housed. Swiftly Cercamon, catching his comrades each by an arm, hustled them up the second flight of stairs that led to the duchess's quarters. Seeing them apparently in flight again, the three Normans ventured forth and made a half-hearted move to follow. A dozen men-at-arms in the livery of Aquitaine, an officer at their head, rushed in from the court. The Normans burst into full cry, but Cercamon forestalled them. Raising his resonant singer's voice in a mighty shout that drowned their cries, he pointed straight at the astonished Normans.

"Ho, duchess's men!" he roared. "Slay these dogs! They plot treason against her Grace!"

The officer, already bewildered by the sight of the three weird figures on the stair—a priest with blood-stained sword, a huge man in leather jipoun who flourished a long, dripping blade, and the governor's squire—stood open-mouthed, waiting explanation.

"Father Ambrose!" he gasped, recognizing Cercamon's robes. Moreover, the troubadour had spoken in the Gascon tongue, in which he had heard the priest acknowledge Aliénor orders; and his southern accent lulled suspicion.

"These dogs would have murdered me because I heard their plots!" he cried again. "They meant to carry off the duchess. Slay them! Take no prisoners!"

HE COUNTED shrewdly on the officer's having heard of Aliénor's purpose to ride forth that night, lest she be taken by Geoffrey. He knew her orders must already have gone forth that her men prepare for the march. Nor did he reckon amiss. With a howl of rage, the Aquitanians sprang on the astounded Normans. These, seeing no way to explain themselves ere the long spears should rend out their lives, burst into headlong flight down the corridor. After them raced the duchess's guard; and after the guard—but much more slowly—Cercamon led his comrades. When the chase had passed the door of his chamber, he drew the other two swiftly in.

"We are safe—for the moment!" he gasped. "Go you, Bruyn, and bid the governor, in the duke's name, admit none to this room. Let him place a guard over it—but say nothing to him of what you have seen!"

Bruyn vanished into the passage, heading swiftly for the Salle D'Armes. Cercamon sank onto his bed.

"By the mass, that was brisk!" he panted; and straightway he rolled upon his side and broke into silent laughter.

Pierre, casting down his bloody sword, reached for his friend's hand.

"I know not how you did it, lad, but I have you to thank that I am not this moment dangling in a noose!" he said earnestly.

Cercamon sat up, wiping his streaming eyes, still struggling with his laughter.

"When I think how the duchess—" he began; then he grew suddenly serious.

"When she learns how we have outwitted her," he said, "she may think I lied to her about Geoffrey, and remain here after all! Ay, and she may yet cajole the governor into searching every corner of the castle for you, Pierre!"

"Geoffrey?" echoed the bewildered Pierre.

"Ay—ask me not now." He tore off the robe of Father Ambrose, stuffed it under the bed and forced on Pierre the gray habit in which he himself had come to Tours.

"Wear that! You are sore in need of garments, and I have hose and mail. So! Now, if any comes, you are a blessed monk—if you can make yourself look smaller, and clothe your face in piety. And I am Cercamon again."

The tramp of mailed feet rang down the corridor; a heavy hand beat on the door.

"Who comes?" Cercamon challenged.

"I—Marc de St. Martin. My squire brought your message, father. Are you in peril? Here has been bloodshed and murder."

Cercamon winked at Pierre.

"Bruyn is a wise youth," he whispered. "He brought my commands as from the duke's messenger, and said nought of the troubadour."

He flung the door open. The governor, backed by a knot of mailed men, turned his eyes to the figure clad in the monk's robe, and stared in astonishment to see how its wearer had grown. Then he gazed at Cercamon, full-mailed and splashed with blood.

"Which of you is you, father?" he gasped; and Cercamon smiled.

"I am Cercamon the troubadour, Sir Marc," he answered. "I was the monk who came to you with the duke's letter. It were unwise for you to ask the name of this holy brother beside me. If you knew, you might deem yourself forced to act in a way that would displease either the duchess or the duke. But you spoke of bloodshed?"

"Three men have been slain under my roof by the duchess's guards," Sir Marc said anxiously. "The alarm was given too late to prevent the deed, and her Grace's officer spoke of a plot against her. Do you know of this?"

Cercamon nodded soberly.

"I know—but here again is a matter which I dare not speak of now. It is most important that the duchess should not know where I and this pious brother lie hidden; but I have an urgent message for her, which I pray that you will take her in person."

He paused, and eyed the governor. It were hard to say whether Sir Marc or Pierre was the more perplexed.

"Say to her," he resumed, "that the warning I gave her is a true one, and that she will do well to flee for Poitiers with all speed. And tell her that the duke knows nothing of what has happened this night, but that I have no doubt of his approval. Assure her that Cercamon the troubadour swears all this upon his honor as a gentleman. And in the meantime—I think you said the duchess has four and twenty men with her?"

"Even so. But—"

"Good. Then, before you go to her, have two score of your staunchest men mounted on the swiftest horses in your stables, and hold them for me at the great gate."

"But—"

"This is the last order which I shall give you in the duke's name!" Cercamon spoke sternly. "As you fulfill it, so will I report on your loyalty to him!"

The governor drew himself up stiffly.

"It shall be done! My squire will bring you word." He marched off, angry, puzzled, but obedient.

Pierre looked at his friend with a whimsical smile.

"What means all this mystery?" he asked.

Swiftly Cercamon explained to him all that had happened since his arrival in Tours; explained, too, how he judged from Geoffrey's half made confession that the young count meant to seize Aliénor's person and lands for himself.

Pierre sat in deep thought for a space; then.

"If Geoffrey is not a fool," he said, "he will not seek her in Tours. You say that you told him you meant to ride hither on my account. Well, by this time—and before—he has learned that you are not in Chinon. He will have guessed that you might use his confidence to force Aliénor to give me up. He will assume, then, that the city is prepared for his coming, and will not dare attack it. He will also suspect that the duchess, frightened by your warning, will flee for her own city of Poitiers. Therefore he will ride, not hither, but straight for the Tours-Poitiers road, and set an ambush for her there."

Cercamon nodded.

"If he is not a fool, yes. I count on his doing so. Your head is clear as ever, my Pierre."

"And for this," Pierre hazarded, "you ordered the two score horse?"

"Even so. Will you ride with me?"

Pierre took his head in his hands.

"I have no love for this duchess," he spoke slowly, "nor do I think it will make for our lord's happiness to marry her. But his will is his will; and who am I to interfere with it? Since he wants her for himself, it is not meet that he should be cozened out of her by his own brother. I will ride with you."

They clasped hands. As they stood thus, they heard footsteps again in the corridor, and the governor's voice craved admission. Entering, he stood before them, the torches borne by his men-at-arms blown backward by the draught. He was smiling. Taking a light from a soldier, he closed the door, shutting the guards out.

"Your men are ready," he announced. "They know they are to ride under Cercamon. Before you go you will do me the honor to dine with me."

"If we may eat swiftly," Cercamon ventured.

"And thoroughly," Pierre amended. "My stomach has had little encouragement for a long ride."

"As it pleases you. The duchess is in a rage. She desires to depart swiftly, but has spent overmuch time searching the tower for her prisoner, Pierre Faidit, who it seems has escaped. She asked also—very angrily, I thought—about yourself, Cercamon. I informed her that you are my guest, and that, to my knowledge, I have not seen this Pierre since I had him cast into prison for her some days gone. Do you perchance know him, good father?"

"He is a friend of my own, and a worthy

fellow," Pierre answered, suppressing his laughter. "I trust he is safe."

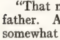
"That may be. I see you bear a sword, father. A strange weapon for a monk, and somewhat like this Pierre's. It may be you would care to see his armor, which is in my care?"

Pierre's eyes twinkled.

"I should like it of all things. I will even wear it a little, in his memory."

The Governor chuckled.

"Sometimes it is good not to know too much!" he said. "Come now and eat, ere your spearmen grow impatient."



WITH the governor's aid the two comrades made their start well ahead of Aliénor, and for the greater part of the night pushed on with all speed to maintain their lead. This they had every hope of doing, for their horses were the pick of Tours. It was an hour past midnight ere they felt safe in taking a softer pace.

The white road, ghostly in the light of a faint moon, stretched straight ahead on its way to Poitiers, the first great city of Aliénor's realm. Faint smells of flowers and moist earth, borne on a light breeze, rose from the night-mantled valley of the Vienne, far southeast of its broader waters by Chinon. The night was still, save for the rattle of the riders' mail and the steady beat of their horses' hoofs.

"If Geoffrey means to set an ambush for her," hazarded Pierre, "'twill be close to the border of Poitou, north of Poitiers. That is the nearest place to his own castle of Mirebeau, which is doubtless his base."

"So I think," Cercamon agreed. "Mirebeau is the only point where he could concentrate his men without Henry's knowledge. From now on we must go warily. Now I do not wish to seem too much against Geoffrey in this matter, seeing that what I suspect of his purpose came to me from his own lips. It were best if you took over command."

He summoned his sergeants, and bade them take orders from Pierre, who at once picked out two of the best-mounted.

"Do ye ride ahead very vigilantly," he commanded, "and make sure that the way is clear. Spur back if ye see or hear men on the road between here and the border."

Certain now that they were well ahead of Aliénor, they resumed the march; but more slowly, that her cavalcade might draw sufficiently close for the purpose Cercamon and Pierre had contrived. The night waned, and the little breeze that blows just before dawn began to shred the fog from the river.

"What town is that which lies ahead?" asked Pierre, pointing to a few bunched lights to the south.

"No town, messire!" a trooper answered. "'Tis the watch-fires on the keep at Chastellarault. We draw close to the Poitou march."

"And dawn is in the sky. Either we have made fools of ourselves, or Geoffrey will be somewhere close at hand. Halt!"

The horses stood, snorting and stamping in the gray chill. Impatient troopers swore under their breath, using the pause to tighten girths and see that their swords were loose in the scabbards.

"It will be soon, or not at all," Cercamon muttered.

The scouts came tearing back.

"There is a wood a mile ahead," they reported. "We heard the neigh of horses and the voices of men."

Pierre glanced at Cercamon.

"Had we ridden farther, they would have heard us also," he spoke. "Now do you two lads reconnoitre the rear!"

They waited again, restless and nervous, till word came that a troop of horse, riding fast, was approaching from the direction of Tours.

"Aliénor!" Pierre exclaimed. "Ride, lads, and make what noise ye can!"

They went on at a canter, calling back and forth loudly, rising high in the saddle to make their armor clash. The sky turned from gray to white, from white to pink. A little ahead lifted the dark tops of massed trees.

The edges of the wood winked suddenly with the glint of steel; and Pierre, pointing, lifted his voice in a great shout:

" 'Ware ambush! *À droite à l'éperon!*"

His column swung to the right, faced west, and sunk their spurs in their horses' sides. Even as they turned, the whole rim of the forest spouted horsemen. Cries rang out, lances dipped; and the rim of the sun, throbbing above the eastern horizon, set the mail-clad ranks ablaze.

The men of Tours had no more than a half-mile lead, and their mounts were weary with the night's work; yet their burst of speed gave proof of the wisdom with which Sir Marc had picked them. They broke across the fields at a splendid pace, red nostrils aflame, clean limbs lifting fleetly. Turning in the saddle, Pierre glanced at their shouting, galloping pursuers, whose ragged front swept on, men crouched over their horses' necks. They rode without formation, still pelting hit-or-miss after their emergence from the broken ground of the forest.

"Nobles—noisy, and too proud to drill!" he mused. "With a boy for leader!"

A clear voice cried after the fugitives; but distance and the clank of mail drowned it to a thin wail. The chase drummed on over the dew-wet grass, swerving to avoid the marshy river-brink, melting into groves, sweeping out again into broad meadows. For a time the men of Tours gained; then, as the long night ride told on their weary beasts, they caught the flash of spears nearer, and heard the beat of hoofs closer behind. At last the pursuers slowly, steadily began to overhaul them.

Pierre pointed to a low hill just ahead, and gave a burst of sharp orders. His men checked their pace to a trot, a canter, a walk, and drew to a halt on its crest. There they shifted from column into line.

A joyful howl rose from the throats of their hunters. In a final flurry of speed the pursuit drew up at the foot of the hill, its stragglers streaming up in disorderly fringes. The morning sun, warm now and bright, touched the bunched horsemen into flame.

"To the rear!" Pierre hissed at Cercamon. "Yon is Geoffrey—you are helmetless, and he will know you!" Cercamon obeyed, and Pierre waited what was to come.

A slender figure in fine mail advanced from the clump of spears at the foot of the hill, while the two forces rested immobile, spears couched, waiting on a word to charge. Pierre, watching the single rider approach, estimated the hostile force at no less than three hundred.

The slender leader halted, and made an impatient gesture.

"Yield!" he shouted. "Surrender the duchess, or we grind you to pieces!"

Pierre smiled. The other's face was hidden in his helmet, but his voice was Geoffrey Plantagenet's.

"In whose name?" he demanded.

Geoffrey hesitated; then—

"Plantagenet!" he cried.

"You are Duke Henry's men?" Pierre asked calmly; and the other, furious to be thus questioned, flung back at him:

"Whose else? Do ye yield, or die?"

Pierre held up his naked sword—that sword like no other in France—so that the sun set the great ruby in its pommel burning.

"We also are Duke Henry's," he made answer. "You can have no quarrel with us!"

The young count's eyes fastened for a moment on the glowing jewel, then roved to Pierre's great height; and recognition shone in them.

"Pierre!" he gasped. "But you—you were—in Tours! And where is—"

He faltered, aware that his errand was one he could scarce confess to his brother's trusted servant.

"I was in Tours," Pierre answered easily, "but now you see me here, on the duke's business. How can I serve you, my lord? And who is this duchess of whom you speak?"

But Geoffrey was only a boy; his patience broke.

"*Peste!* Do you mock me, Pierre? Before ——, I could stamp you to dust, if it pleased me!"

Pierre coaxed his horse forward, step by step, and halted within arm's reach of Geoffrey. He flashed a glance past the angry lad, to the massed spears that waited within the space of a javelin-cast. He slid his sword into its scabbard.

"My sword is now sheathed," he said. "I am a peaceful man. But I can draw fast, my lord. It is not for you to interfere with the duke's affairs. Have I your word to let us go unscathed?"

Geoffrey's men swayed a little forward behind him, and gripped their spears so that the points quivered. But Geoffrey knew Pierre. One look into the hard, dark eyes that were all he could see of the steel-circled face; one glance at the sinewy hand that rested lightly on the jeweled hilt, and he cried angrily over his shoulder—

"Fall back, men of Anjou!"

As they retired, he answered, sullenly—

"You have my word, Pierre."

"That is good, lord count. Now I think your business here is brought to an end. For while ye have chased us so far from the highway, the Duchess Aliénor has safely passed the border into her own land. We have saved you from a deed that would have done you great harm."

Geoffrey turned his back.

"About!" he cried, in a voice thick with rage. As his men wheeled, he pointed a trembling hand toward the distant Poitiers road.

"Ride, while there may be time!"

So the knights of Anjou and their men-at-arms galloped back, in a last, hopeless attempt to overtake their quarry. But they of Tours laughed, knowing the chase vain.

Cercamon returned to his friend.

"And now?" he asked.

"Back to Tours," Pierre answered gravely, "with these borrowed spears. And there our ways part for a while. You must go to Henry, and account for these two days. They have been good days, lad, and I shall not forget them. I must bide in Tours, where I shall be safe—now. But there will be another spring, when the wind blows fair for England; and there we shall meet again."

Cercamon seized his hand.

"Ay, we shall meet, under the duke's banner!"

"Nay!" Pierre cried, his eyes shining. "Under the king's!"

SAM HOUSTON'S DUELING

By Eugene Cunningham

THERE are few odder heroic figures in the pioneer history of America than Sam Houston. Successively, he was by adoption a Cherokee; lieutenant under Andrew Jackson in the Creek War; U. S. Senator from Tennessee and later Governor of that State. He was commander-in-chief of the Texan Army and conqueror of Santa Anna; twice President of the Republic of Texas; U. S. Senator from the State; Governor until his deposition in 1861 for fighting the secessionists. He died in 1863.

Says a contemporary of him, when Sam Houston was a member of the Senate from Texas: "He was large of frame, of stately carriage and dignified manner, and had a lion-like countenance capable of expressing the fiercest passions. His dress was peculiar, but it was becoming to his style. The conspicuous features of it were a military cap, and a short military cloak of fine blue broadcloth with a blood-red lining. Occasionally he wore a vast and picturesque sombrero and a Mexican blanket—a sort of ornamented bed-quilt."

Egotism was well developed in Houston. He dressed in the mode but always with a Houstonian touch—the sombrero or serape. If he pleaded the case of his Indian brothers he would dress in full Cherokee regalia. His typical signature was read by friend and foe alike just as he intended it to be: *I Am Houston!*

He was admitted to the bar after studying law for six months. It was a day when personality and the gift of gab—both prominent qualities in Houston—were more important than a knowledge of Blackstone. Houston was quite successful in the law, but his furious temper and caustic tongue brought many quarrels and so, in that day of the *code duello*, many challenges. But he had little use for duels and his own ways of avoiding them in a time when refusal of a challenge was almost a confession of cowardice.

When a wrathful friend challenged him in person, Sam Houston remarked whimsically—

"Well, I should like to know, if a man can't abuse his *friends*, who in —— he can abuse!"

The friend laughed despite himself and that incident closed bloodlessly. But another challenger was more insistent and more formal. His second hounded Houston until in desperation the latter turned to his secretary and asked solemnly how many affairs of honor were on file. After much business of shuffling papers, the secretary replied—

"Thirteen."

Sam Houston nodded gravely and turned to the second.

"Sir," he said courteously, "your principal's challenge is hereby accepted. You will notify him that his case has been assigned Number Fourteen on my list. As soon as the preceding thirteen have been settled, we shall notify you."

It is not of record that Houston ever worked down the list to fourteen.

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

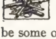
Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.


THOUGH this practically unknown little chapter in our history is hardly in the line of the particular author suggested, maybe some other member of our writers' brigade will find in it material to his liking.

Newark, New Jersey.

From time to time in "Camp-Fire" I have noticed letters from comrades appealing to writers, readers and adventurers for enlightenment on certain subjects concerning which they either are just curious or have incomplete details in the matter, and rarely have I seen their requests fall on deaf ears. For instance, the comrade who asked about Didier Masson in the February issue to have his query answered by none other than D. M. himself. I thought that was a wonderful piece of literary magnetism by which the seeker and the sought "met."

BEARING all this in mind, please harken to the following event, regarding which I have too little facts and most other Americans no knowledge whatsoever. It was that great American, Theodore Roosevelt, who is quoted as saying that had it occurred at any other time it would have gone down in history as one of the most remarkable undertakings of its kind of all time. While Pickett was making his immortal charge, (or perhaps, while over a hundred thousand men were engaged in the decisive struggle at Gettysburg would be more accurate as to time,) and a nation held its breath pending the outcome of the battle, a little Yankee sloop-of-war, mounting 8 or 10 guns, was hammering at the shore defenses of a Japanese harbor held by revolting Nipponese who resented the coming of the white man and his trade.

ADMIRAL PERRY, in his visit a decade previous to this trouble, had presented to the Mikado and his court, on behalf of his country, many gifts of the outside world. You undoubtedly remember that. You will also recall that Britain, Germany, France and Italy later duplicated the step of America and one or more ports were opened in consequence to the erstwhile hated "hairy barbarians." Among these presents were modern cannon, and, with the latter, expert instruction in their use. The Japanese of that time as well as today were apt scholars and quick to grasp. Therefore, when a certain element of the Nipponese who had not been changed in their attitude toward the outside world by the good will shown, gifts and homage paid their Emperor, decided to oust the whites, they did not don their ancient armor or grasp their obsolete weapons, but, instead, seized all available cannon, powder, ball *et cetera*, fortified the harbor with Dahlgren cannon and rigged out two ships in the port with cannon and ammunition, rallied sympathizers and defied all comers.

Their position was strong and the odds heavily in their favor. The land batteries were mounted on a high bank, guns trained on the opposite shore into which were driven stakes for range adjustment purposes. Clever, eh? Any ship attempting to pass would have been literally blown out of the water or, should this not happen, would immediately engage the "warships" inside. If the latter failed to sink the invader, boarding parties would conclude the matter. Well laid plans, an abundance of ammunition and guns, thanks to those well-meaning but rather foolish whites, and plenty (and then some) of men, the plucky commander of this plucky ship viewed a rather interesting day in the making.

THANKS to the low draft of the American craft, the skipper was able to pilot his vessel perilously near the fortified height, *under*, not in front of, the muzzles of those enemy guns. Naturally when the Japs' salvo opened the murderous shot and shell clove mighty holes in the inoffensive opposite shore and tore a few holes of little consequence in the sloop's upper rigging, all of which must have afforded the American tars much amusement, but did small damage to the ship itself. Once past this big danger, the sloop with its guns working as none but Yankees can do it, engaged the naval end of the matter in a brief but thoroughly effective battle, the finale of which was the sinking of both Jap ships. The sloop came about and with characteristic efficiency demolished the shore batteries, cared for her few casualties, mended her own meager wounds and sailed off in quest of more enemies of her beloved land.

The odds she overcame, I have failed to mention because I lack details. However, I can safely assure you that she was in arrears as to guns in the ratio of at least 4 to 1, as to ships I know—2 to 1 and as to men, it was possibly 15 or 20 to 1.

Later, the vanquished, stung by their defeat, which did not take an hour for all their preparations and plans, remounted the shore guns and either raised or salvaged the ships for the sunken cannon and held off an Allied fleet of many ships, guns and men for about four or five hours. There's a comparison for you! It took a fleet hours to accomplish what one small sloop did in less than an hour! There were no American vessels in the fleet.

NOW will some kind soul, preferably your Mr. Pendexter, be kind enough to delve into this event, garner the actual facts (please remember I am relating this tale from memory, and I read of it some 8 or 10 years ago, so don't think ill of me if the yarn is a trifle shaky in spots) and present them to Camp-Fire, so another heroic incident may be unearthed and the American public will realize that Washington, Lincoln, Lee, Nathan Hale, Hobson, Dewey and others are not the only ones to be proud of.

In some forgotten grave lie the remains of this commander, unhonored and unknown! Just another slave to patriotic motives, a serf to the land that is so quick to love but quicker to forget its noble sons and daughters. They prate about the heroes of this war and that, decorate the ones who live only to forget those who pay the supreme price. The life that is so precious they gave without a murmur, those sacred boys.

Please confer this favor, not only for my sake, but for the sake of the national tradition which is so dear to us all, and accept my thanks for your hoped for efforts.—WILLIAM A. BOWIE.

* * *

IN THIS issue is a novelette entitled "Mud," by J. D. Newsom. In the September 20 issue was a novelette, by Robert Simpson, with the same title. It's ordinary editorial usage to avoid the repetition of a title after so short an interval, but in each of these cases the title seemed exactly the right one, so we let ordinary editorial usage go hang.

Here is something from him about the story:

The Foreign Legion was not at Frise early in 1916 when the Germans took the village. They moved up into the Somme sector just before the July 1st attack. They were, bar none, the toughest outfit I have ever bumped into, but they knew how to fight. So much for historical accuracy.

If the Foreign Legion wasn't on the spot, I was. At that time the war was still fairly young and gas was a novelty. I was on my way down to Suzanne when the show started and the valley, immediately behind the trenches, where I was walking was drenched with tear gas. I had left my goggles in my dug-out and spent a miserable half-hour getting down to headquarters. Later in the day I took a trench mortar battery to the edge of the marshes and wrought great havoc among the cat-tails until a German battery spotted us and blew us into the middle of next week. We had a thin time.

In those days—I speak of the winter of 1915-16—the "mopping up" of captured ground had not been developed into the exact science it was to become later after both sides had learned their lesson. For several days after the attack enthusiasts who had not surrendered came crawling back through the marshes.

I knew one young man who was so impressed by the ease with which those swamps could be crossed that he got permission to go and explore behind the German lines. He returned three days later with a most amazing story of braining sentries and riding about beneath the tarpaulins of ration carts, and he said he had located several battery positions. He got a medal and his cap became much too small for his head. Then he went out again and never came back.

I went to Frise about two months ago. It had been rebuilt and the manure piles in the farmyards might be a pre-war vintage, they are so mountainous and prosperous-looking.—J. D. **Newsom.**

* * *

SOME comrade objected to something in one of John Webb's stories that reflected on the quality and quantity of rations served our troops in France. Mr. Webb replied, backing up his statements and the matter was referred to those of Camp-Fire who could speak from direct experience. Quite a number have spoken, all on Mr. Webb's side. Here is one that speaks briefly but pretty well presents the case for all the others:

Gretna, Louisiana.

I note in your issue of June 10th, a letter from C. B. A., late Captain Sanitary Corps, U. S. A.

Reading between the lines of his unjust criticism of Mr. Webb betrays the fact that the Captain was engaged in theoretical research and not the problem confronting company commanders, *i. e.*, providing their men with food enough *of any sort* to relieve hunger. I seriously doubt that any combat outfit was ever served 100 balanced rations in France, while half and quarter rations were common.—**Charles A. Hardie**, Military Engineer, Member S. A. M. E.

Another letter, going more into detail, might be added. I don't believe any more are needed.

You can't feed an army in the field, 3000 miles from home, with the regularity of a boarding-house, especially if it's an army from a country that was "too proud to fight" and too stupid even to make elementary preparations against a day when we might be forced to fight whether we were proud or not. But a little less graft and pull would have helped a whole lot.

And of course nothing beyond a few gestures has ever been done to bring to book—namely the penitentiary or the hangman's noose—the arch traitors who did their grafting at the expense of our men's empty bellies, not to mention our dead who could have been alive if it hadn't been for human vultures who saw a chance to fatten their pocketbooks.

And of course the haggling politicians, aided by our own indifference and stupidity, are letting us get into just about the same condition of unpreparedness as kept us useless for a whole year after we declared war. Next time the other fellow may declare it, in which case it is extremely unlikely that he'll wait to give us a year for preparation before invading us.

This lack of preparedness would of course afford a better chance for grafters when the calamity fell upon us, and I suppose the politicians have this in mind. They seldom look farther ahead than graft and would probably not consider the fact that an armed and fully prepared foe exploding in our midst would make the collecting of graft not particularly easy or lucrative.

Omaha, Nebraska.

Went over with the First Division and then transferred to the 26th. Went to the Chemin de Dames front, Feb. 5, 1918. The first two weeks we —— near starved to death—in fact if it wasn't for good old Bull Durham which we traded to the French for loaves of bread etc., we no doubt would have starved. The French troops seemed to be very well supplied with eatables, at least they always had some bread and sausage etc. in their knapsacks outside of their soup-gun meals. You never saw an American doughboy carrying anything to eat in his haversack. We were lucky to carry something in our stomachs, let alone in haversacks. Was on the front ten months, two months behind the lines and five months in the hospitals and I don't remember a single instance where a French soldier bummed an American for something to eat. This in view of the fact that my outfit was always trying to find some French soup-gun (rolling kitchen) in order to take the wrinkles out of their bellies.

AT THAT the food at the front was fair (mostly slum and beans), but behind the lines, where we were supposed to "rest up," they feed us bully beef and hardtack. Many a time did we wish we were back on the front line just to get something decent to eat—what there was of it.

On Christmas day, 1918, at Base 104, Bordeaux, they gave us a nice dinner of: Piece of cold beef, a spud with the jacket on and black coffee and bread. This for sick and wounded men, mind you, and right at a base where they were supposed to bring the supplies in from the U. S. Absolutely no excuse for it.

Never heard of the "nutrition section" of the medical or sanitary corps but if they are the birds responsible for giving us carrots and cabbage without anything else during the second battle of the Marne I'm sure down on 'em. We wanted meat—to —— with carrots and cabbage when a man's hungry.

Another absolute fact and I won't blame you if you laugh. At the hospitals at Bordeaux in 1918 they served us tea for supper. In the morning they would take what tea was left over, put some coffee grounds into it and hand it out to us as coffee. A man couldn't tell which it was. We had some funny arguments about this, one man claiming it was tea and another that it was coffee. Ain't this the cat's whiskers? I could fill out a few sheets in favor of Mr. Webb but takes too much space. Mr. Captain of the Nutrition Section must have the officers mess in mind when he says we were fed good.

In regards to Leonard Nason's story "A Sergeant of Cavalry" in the June 20th issue wish to say that I never heard of the 31st nor 94th divisions in France at least not at Chateau Thierry. I suppose he merely selected these two to make the story sort of anonymous? Otherwise his story is tray beans.

Hoffman, there's one exquisite moment that you never enjoyed in your life and Old Leonard Nason will back me up in this. Here's what I mean:

After you've been marching all day in the heat and you finally get orders to fall out and pitch your tents, and you sit yourself down and unroll your wrap leggins, pull up your underpants and then scratch, scratch, and scratch. Boy! Aint it a grand and glorious feeling? I used to scratch my legs until they were covered with blood, but I'm telling the world it sure felt fine. The coots been biting me all day but I couldn't get at 'em account of the leggins, but when I did get at 'em—Whee!

Pardon the poor typing but I got shot thru the shoulder and lung and it sorta effects my right arm. Can't hardly use a pen or pencil at all a-tall.—STANLEY YELNEK.

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IN THIS issue the series "Great Adventures of the Super-Minds" presents the author of "Don Quixote" and Post Sargent reassures us as to the historical accuracy of the sketch in spite of the fact that it reads like fiction of the extreme melodramatic type.

"Plato" in a coming issue will end this series, but another along the same lines will follow it. Super-minds are none too plentiful and only a few of them have had "great adventures" in a physical sense. There were rather a surprizing number of these who had had at least some physical adventures, but not sufficient in number or intensity to warrant the adjective "great." So a broader field was opened up by not making "super-mind" a necessary qualification and the following series is merely "The Goodly Company of Adventurers." Yet, even of these, a majority are famous for other things than adventure.

Cervantes is a mosaic. Almost incredible as the story is, for instance the hiding of some fifteen men in an underground cell for over six months, it is historically true. The documents exist to prove it. There are gaps in the account that I have filled in; the interpolated parts can not be gainsaid. I have used some of Cervantes' own writings, such as stray mentions in his "Picture of Algiers," in "Don Quixote," in some of his "Exemplary Novels," as also mentions in Haedo's account of Cervantes' imprisonment—here and there. Where the sense demanded it, I have pieced on to what Cervantes actually said in some work, my own idea of what he must have said to fill the gaps, where history does not speak in detail. As a result, I think I could safely defy even a Cervantes scholar to say, without recourse to his library, what is from the written record and what is added by me.

A WORD to Camp-Fire from Arthur O. Friel in connection with his novelette in this issue—something about the real "doings" on which the story is based:

Some time ago I spun a little yarn for you chaps regarding the experiences of one *Hard Hart* and one *Bull Kelly*, alias *El Tigre* and *El Toro*, upon one river Orinoco. Also among those present was a little lady out of luck, *Jean Rogers*, and a somewhat slippery individual named *Pablo Benito*. I left these four folks and their launch heading for the lower river, with revolutionary activities merrily busting loose along said river. Since then several of you have taken your quills in hand to point out that quite a number of things might happen to this quartet before they could reach Ciudad Bolívar, and that it was up to me to trail along with them for at least a few more leagues. You were dead right. The fact is, I intended to tell some more of this story long before now; but my rudder got jammed and sheered me away off my course.

YES, señores, quite a number of things may happen down in that part of the world; and when they do happen they're likely to come in flocks. Some of the events in the present story, for instance, actually have happened. The town of Caicara was raided by *revolucionarios*—eight hundred of them, who suddenly appeared in canoes from the west—in the summer of 1922, while I was paddling my *curial* down the river on my way out. The *jefe civil*, an ex-rebel, was shot three times by the leader of the raiders, who was his own kinsman. Just how he escaped with his life was a moot question when I reached the town; but escape he did. After setting this good example to his men, the rebel general had two of them formally executed because they did practically the same thing; they shot up a noncombatant who had aroused their anger. At the execution the genial general informed all and sundry that he stood for "order." In the interests of this same "order" he had recently attacked San Fernando de Apure (which is by no means the San Fernando de Atabapo of my other Venezuelan stories) and, in the course of a demonstration of his peaceful proclivities, had caused about 200 casualties. The name of this gentleman and his relative the *jefe civil*, by the way, was not *Gordo*, but its exact opposite in Spanish, meaning "thin."

PERCHANCE some of you, unacquainted with the "dumbness" of most Latins in matters mechanical, may say that the barefaced hoodwinking of *Mendez* would be impossible. But not so. Put a real *Mendez* up against a real *Kelly* with motor trouble to be solved, and *Kelly* could convince him that the engine was made of green cheese and the power generated by maggots. For that matter, I have seen, right here in our own States, a first-class automobile driver sweat blood for days over the ignition of a motorboat, finally quitting in a blue funk; and then a vagabond who had drifted that way stepped into the boat and got her running like a watch within half an hour. The source of trouble, when pointed out, was so obvious that the chauffeur looked like a kicked pup. Latin Americans aren't the only ones who are thick when it comes to lining up a marine motor.—A. O. F.

THEY seem to have sort of a good time together, these modern archers. Here's the invitation sent out for the annual meet this year from their headquarters, 616 Old South Building, Boston:

Harken! alle Archers and Bowmen, to the Proclamacyon of the five and fortieth yerely Tournament of the Nacional Archerye Associacion to be holden on Saint Agapetus his Daye, ye xviij August next ensuing and three fulle dayes thereafter, in the City of Rome. And now the Heralds go forth, east and west and north and south, through Toune and Hamlet and Country side, and bid alle who can draw the Long Bowe and who ken the joye of a well sped Shaft, that they come to this grand Shootinge. A score of bright Targets, made by Duff of Jersey the Fletcher, will stand on the Green, and therebe places enough for four score Bowmen. Then will be heard the merrie twang of the bowe strings, and the whir of the fethered arrows, and the blasts of the bugle horn. Elmer a Wayne, and Will the Palmer, and Jiles of Pittsburgh Towne, and Rudolph La Gai, and eke other sturdy Yeomen of their regard will try their skill at five score paces, and many Prizes of strong yewe Bowes and broad smooth Shafts will be given to them that shoot most true. Meat and great Bottels of Ale-o-Ginger will be set forth in the Halle of the Archers for alle the Companye, and Minstrels and Gestours and Harpers will make music and other merriment at eventide, and he that entereth not in the Lists and sporteth not in the Revels shall be accompted of no more worth than a clipt Groat.

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ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine, Richard Howells Watkins follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself. But he talks mostly about the adventures of others—the airmen.

New York City.

Adventurers, as a general rule, are much too busy adventuring to tell anybody about it, so there must be individuals in the world who can be classed as only adventurers' "Boswells." I'm one of those things. That is my only explanation of why I'm venturing into the radiance of the Camp-Fire. There ought to be more of us, for too many of the exciting moments of life, the daring deeds, and the ticklish situations, fail to reach print because the participants aren't handy on the pen or typewriter.

AFTER four years on the old *Sun* of New York, as a reporter, the war turned out to be very dull, as far as I was concerned. Once the powers in charge of the U. S. N. R. F. sent me up to Pelham Bay to take an examination, but mostly they kept me right in the heart of Manhattan, away from the water and the navy and the war because my eyesight was so defective they alleged I couldn't see the enemy. Personally, I can think of occasions when this would be an advantage, but never mind that. The fact remains that the war was dull.

So, when I was turned back into civilian life again, I took the matter up with Kenneth Lord, my old city editor, and after a fifth of a second's thought he made me aviation editor and sent me out to Mineola, assuring me that I'd get all the thrills I desired.

AND it was right there on Long Island that I qualified as an adventurers' Boswell. For in my opinion every last man who ever touched a joystick is an adventurer, and more. He is a frontiersman, and he is steadily extending the dominion of man over that last, vast uncharted area—the air. Man can go practically anywhere on land or sea, and in two decades the flying men have made it possible for him, after countless centuries bound to earth, to sail his craft almost everywhere above the earth. You certainly get that pioneering feeling when you are on board a ship, though merely a passenger, flying across country as utterly unknown, from an aeronautical standpoint, as was the ocean in Columbus' day. Maybe you'll spot a field you can land in if your gas gives out or your motor cracks, and maybe you'll have to sideslip her into a lake among the rugged mountains. Maybe you'll hit a fog that will blind your eyes and steal away your sense of equilibrium, or maybe you'll have a tail wind and do three miles a minute through sunshine and intoxicating air to your destination. But you never know what you're in for after that last bump that puts you up in the air.

JUST after the war was a bad time for aviation. Manufacturers turned out a good many planes developed for peace time use, expecting the world to leap at once into the air. But the world—its people, that is—stayed right on the ground. It didn't look safe. So the adventurers took up the job of pioneering, and soon gypsy fliers, with old machines and more debts than dollars, went over the country, cracking up and going broke, but always preparing the way for the commercial aviation that now is coming. And with these men and the test pilots of a few airplane companies that wouldn't give up I flew, and I learned about adventuring from them in the course of several thousand miles in the air in all types of ships. They're not a self-advertising lot, so I bang the lyre for them, and I'll back almost any oil-smeared, bankrupt, cigaret consuming gypsy flier against any plume-decked knight of the past, or any world-wanderering explorer, in the matter of the true heart of an adventurer.—R. H. WATKINS.

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IF THIS is true, it makes me ashamed of my country—or rather of the "statesmen" who are running it and of the financiers who are running most of the "statesmen." And of ourselves for letting them do it.

Sorel, P. Q., Canada.

The enclosed was a leading editorial in the Montreal *Star*. I send it on because I remember the story of the Czecho-Slovaks as given in *Adventure*. If the *Star* has its facts right, this should interest Camp-Fire.

I'm admitting right off that as a Canadian newspaper the *Star* is butting into other folks' affairs.

Also, as a Canadian, I'm butting in myself in forwarding it to you. At the same time it may be useful.

OF COURSE all the inter-allied debt business raises —— all round whenever it comes up. I've read page after page of the economists on this business and the only conclusion I have reached so far is that, while there are too many debts, there are, equally, too many economists and experts, so I don't want to crowd into the arena as a new one. However, as a member of Camp-Fire, with that story you published of the great trek they made fresh in my mind, the enclosed bothered me a bit.

There's been a lot of nonsense talked about war debts, one way and another. But this case is a bit different. I personally have no use for the wailing debtor. But in this particular instance I'd gamble that the comrades of Camp-Fire would have a whale of a lot of use for a generous creditor. If the United States must have the eleven millions, why not pass the account around to the various Allies?

If we had lost the war, the rest of us, behind new frontiers, would have had some chance of reorganizing and a future chance to square things with our conquerors. But the Czechs would have been exiles, their entire country in the heart of the victorious enemy's domain. I think their gamble was bigger than ours. And if any one is to be excused from paying their bills I nominate them.

AS I said before, it's not my business. But here I go starting to be an expert, just the same. Anyway, here is the clipping. If it's right you may care to use it. In any case, if you got the thrill out of that story about them that I did, you'll read it with personal, if not editorial interest.

It would seem, also, to back up those who claim the world is getting more material.

Of course it is likely that the other allies have sent in their little bills to Czecho-Slovakia. But this is the first one I've come across. If the others have not, this may show them where to dig for buried treasure. If my memory serves, the Czechs camped at Valcartier, and so far as I am aware our Canadian Government hasn't yet collected ground rent—though they may have, at that.

However, since it is not my business I'll cease fire. Here's the clipping.—L. PAUL.

HERE is the editorial from the Montreal *Star* of July 11:

Making Heroes Pay

THE pistol shot at Sarajevo that heralded the greatest war of history was fired in protest against Austria's treatment of the subject races under her suzerainty. The history of Central Europe for half a century before the Great War was a black chapter of oppression of minorities, of deliberate and heartless persecution of weaker peoples by those who held the power. The story of Herzegovina, of the Banat and the oppression of many Balkan peoples is the culminating chapter in the history of the House of Hapsburg which dishonored their heraldic shield and eventually brought about the downfall of the last remnants of the Holy Roman Empire.

No sooner had the war begun than there were stories of discontent coming out of Austria. Although conscripted for military service, thousands of men fought under the hated double eagle with no zest for the fighting and a hatred of those who led them into battle. There were desertions and stories of men deliberately maiming themselves in order that they might be unfit for military service. There followed stories of desertions of whole companies of Czech, and finally an entire army was organized in Russia from Czech and Slovak prisoners of war under almost insurmountable difficulties.

This army gained strength and won prestige. After the summer of 1917 it was practically the only army on the Russian front capable of real military action. The army supported Kerensky in his revolution and bore the heat and burden of the day. When the Bolshevists came into power, swelled to 50,000 strong, the army was in the Ukraine. They were in desperate plight when the Germans advanced and everywhere was disorganization and anarchy. It was then that the Emperor Charles sent a last despairing message, promising these men that they would be amnestied and their lands restored to them if they laid down their arms. It was a tempting bait, but these Czechs and Slovaks were made of stern stuff and the memory of persecutions that had entered the iron of their soul made them spurn the offer.

They could not hold their front and so they began the great retreat from Kiev which is one of the epics of the war. Their troops had been proclaimed a part of the Czecho-Slovak army that was operating on the Western front in support of the Allies, and they conceived the magnificent plan—scoffed at by practical men as foolhardy and impossible of accomplishment—of transporting that army across Siberia and through America to France. Cheated by German promises on the first day of their retreat, they began to trek a disciplined host. Two months later they laid down their arms in response to the demands of the Bolshevists and handed over to the Soviet rulers horses, arms, airplanes and munitions, and moved eastward in eighty great train loads. Threatened daily by machine-gun fire, harassed and hungry during the two months of the journey, the army of patriots finally reached Vladivostok and were enthusiastically welcomed by the Allied regiments there.

Then came orders from Lenin, "Stop the Czecho-Slovaks," and every form of petty persecution was used to arouse them to irritation and violence. But four years of service had trained these heroes in the hard school of iron discipline. They overcame the enemy that fought them in secret with lies and treacheries and finally Capt. Hurban came to Washingto to report to Professor Masaryk, the president of the National Council, and later first president of the Republic of Czecho-Slovakia, and tell him the story of how General Gaida's army of heroes had fought their way through 2,000 miles of hostile territory inspired by a pure love of their Fatherland, had undergone hardships and suffering and had risked death. It is a tale no less thrilling than that which records how Cortez drove from Vera Cruz to the ancient Aztec capital in the sixteenth century.

And now comes the sequel. America fed these men in Vladivostok, transported them overseas, carried them across the continent in their railways and shipped them back across the Atlantic. They were brothers in distress, men who fought on the side of the Allies, heroes who had been willing to travel half way round the world in their effort to array themselves against their old oppressors and on the side of America and the Allies. They had faced death and certain suffering for the cause, but they must pay the bill. They traveled in American ships, on American railways and were fed by American rations, and Czecho-Slovakia is now presented with an account for $11,000,000 for the accommodation.

Does the hero who carries in a wounded man from the hottest of the fight send in a bill for his services? This is the great romance of the war, and the men are charged by their brothers-in-arms for being transported to the front where they hoped to be of service in the cause which both the Allies and America had at heart.

Hasn't the bill got into the wrong envelope?

SHYLOCK? He was a philanthropist in comparison with whatever "gentlemen" and "Americans" are responsible for our national policy of collecting the pound of flesh. Here is materialism in all its glorious beauty. This is what they call being "practical." Poppycock! Just as "practical" as it proved in Shylock's case.

If one of your neighbors did a trick like that you'd consider him about as mean, small, greedy, hard and contemptible as they make 'em. And our great and glorious, and very wealthy, republic is doing it!

O noble Republican Administration, who have been able to formulate no other policy than "economy" for every one except big business and the holders of great wealth, if our rich country is so hard up, here is a better way of getting money than bleeding it out of comrades in arms. Take it back from the grafters, beginning with the war-time grafters and *not* skipping the biggest grafters. Here is wealth untold. Is it not better to take money from thieves than from friends, from the rich than the poor? Is it not better to penalize traitors than to wring dry the small pocket of an ally?

O Prohibitionists, Anti-Weaponists and all other reformers who fondly believe the way to remedy an evil is to pass a law against it, here is an evil greater than any you inveigh against, an evil that makes futile every law you pass. Graft—the robbing and betraying of one's own government, one's own country, one's own people, the nullifier of laws, destroyer of a people's morals, the rotting of all upon which a country must depend for its continued life. Treason, black treason. Crime, the dirtiest, rottenest, most harmful of crimes, for, crime in itself, it opens the doors to all other crimes.

Here is a case in which it is worth while passing a law against an evil, for the fundamental reason for the extent of graft among us is that we have no generally understood code of public morality and at the word "graft" we have been taught to smile, to admire in secret, to emulate. A law against graft, even if as unenforced as the Prohibition law, would be of incalculable value because it would begin the education of the people in public morality, make them begin to think of graft as really a crime, be as reluctant to shake the hand of a grafter as the hand of a common thief, as reluctant to admit him, however rich and powerful, to their homes, their clubs, their businesses. *That* will kill off graft or any other crime faster than any law that man can pass. The law will be potent only if it brings about that attitude in the people's minds. Greater than any legal apparatus man can devise is the force of social ostracism, the terrible pressure of a man's treatment by his fellows.

O noble Administration, forget the "big business" of collecting debts from comrades in arms and clean your own dirty house. From you, and through you, and the other Administrations before and after you, graft is taking far more than all the debts of all our allies. Don't punish it by the silly, dishonest method of imposing fines that can be paid out of the stolen money itself. Make it punishable by penitentiary sentence only, a minimum of not less than five years and a maximum of life.

And in the meantime for ——'s sake find something better and bigger to do than collecting $11,000,000 from little Czecho-Slovakia for helping her help us in fighting the common foe.

* * *

HOW did the early inhabitants of North and South America get here, where did they come from and who were they? Also, Mr. Mundy, where did the Alexandrian Library get to if it was not destroyed? I'd meant to ask the same question myself.

Paris, France.

In your issue of August 20th I notice that Mr. E. F. Test writes to Camp-Fire regarding the origin of the Indians. Can you spare me space to submit a theory of my own which is substantiated by a good deal of fact?

LEAVING aside all questions being touched on in the serio-comic discussion now going on in Dayton, Tennessee, and taking a purely astronomical point of view, it is surmised that this globe was once a molten mass. As it cooled off, the surface hardened first and consequently contracted, or tried to. The resistance offered by the interior fluid or semi-fluid portion resulted in contraction in one place and corresponding expansion in another; mountains were formed in one place, valleys in another; continents rose up and hollows occurred which were filled by the sea.

This process of readjustment has been going on ever since—is still going on, as manifested in the form of earthquakes and volcanic effects. These readjustments were doubtless far more violent in days gone by than they are now. Whole continents disappeared beneath the waves and new ones came up. We know of several "glacial ages," which were merely phenomena in the process. I read in the papers recently that General Smuts, Premier of South Africa, prophesied another such "Glacial Age" in 10,000 years' time. I don't know whether he got his idea from scientific deduction or whether it was merely a "hunch." Anyway it is sufficiently reasonable to be taken seriously.

I SUGGEST that if you go back far enough, say 50,000 years, the disposition of the continents was very different then from what they are now. They were thickly populated and in the disaster most of the inhabitants were killed off, the survivors starting afresh in the new continents which appeared.

Your correspondent speaks of Atlantis, which I think was first spoken of by Plato. It was long regarded as a myth, but I think that it is pretty certain that it did actually exist. It was not the only subsidence which has occurred but, being one of the most recent—happening perhaps some 8,000 years ago—it has the best chance of being recorded.

Here is a curious fact, and one which seems to have escaped notice. About 25 years ago one of the transatlantic cables broke some 500 miles north of the Azores. The ship sent to repair it encountered considerable difficulty owing to the great depths. In one of their attempts to haul up the loose ends they brought up to the surface some specimens of volcanic rock which, judging from its structure, could only have been formed at *atmospheric pressure.*

TURNING now to the Pacific, we find that curious phenomenon Easter Island. A small island in the middle of the ocean where one finds rock-work which could only have been carried out by a large and well-organized population. Easter Island is doubtless the last vestige of a continent which sank beneath the waves.

I know that it has often been suggested that the North American Indian came originally from China *via* Alaska. Some hike! Especially when you consider that one finds a not dissimilar type in Patagonia! I don't believe it. They came from the submerged continent in the Pacific! Some, no doubt, came from Atlantis, the Mayas, for example, and perhaps the Toltecs. I consider that a large portion of the inhabitants of Atlantis were white. One has heard of "White Indians" in Central America recently. Discoveries made during the last few months testify to the existence of a civilization previous to that of the Mayas, in the same area. When one part of the continent sank there was doubtless a migration; when more trouble arrived there was another exodus.

In Southwest France there are relics of a civilization dating back 25,000 years. Paintings on the walls of caves reveal a fully developed art—not attempts to start something. There are traces of other arrivals some 8,000 years ago. Where did these folk come from?

THIS is not the place for enlarging on the subject any further. I will merely call attention to one or two other points.

I think that your correspondent is apt to assume a bit too much from the termination "Zin." Don't forget that it may well be mere chance that there is any resemblance. In this connection let me mention that in Southwest France at the present time the termination "ac" is very common in the names of places and persons. This same ending can be found in numerous places in America, North and South.

Finally let me point out that "dolmens," *i.e.* burial-places consisting of a large cap-stone supported by *three* other stones, are found in Brittany, in Western France, which is, geologically, a very old part—much older than the rest of France. These dolmens are also found in Cornwall in Western England, which is also "old" geologically; in Northern Arabia, and, I am informed, in Central America.

Bearing all the above in mind, the fact that there are blue-eyed Choctaws, as your correspondent says, need not surprize one at all; they came from Atlantis.

Mr. Test refers to the Chinese; it should not be forgotten that the Chinese are not all of the same type. One can detect Caucasian and—what is more remarkable—negro types among them. How do you explain that?

Has Mr. Mundy (whose letter of June 30th incited Mr. Test to write) any idea as to where the Alexandrian Library can have got to?—T. G. G. BOLITHO.

* * *

INDEXES by volume for most of the volumes of *Adventure* back to about 1912 are on hand and will be sent free to any reader who will pay the necessary postage. Allow about one-half cent per index for postage and be sure to specify the volume for which you wish the indexes when you write.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

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"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue.*)

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WILL BUY: Nov. 1910, Jan., Feb., March, May, July, Sept., 1911; March, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., 1912 and Jan. and Sept., 1913—$.25 each.—Address CHARLES SHEPARD, 954½ Hollins St., Los Angeles, Calif.

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Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

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Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to LAURENCE JORDAN.

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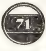

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

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This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

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Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing, commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the U. S., Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. Islands Part 3 Cuba
WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.

7. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

8. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., Boite No. 167, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

9. ★ Australia and Tasmania
PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

11. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring,

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commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

12. Philippine Islands.
Buck Connor, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

13. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

14. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

15. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure*. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

17. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Captain C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure*. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

18. ★ Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

19. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

20. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

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Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

22. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

23. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

24. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
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25. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

26. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

27. Turkey
J. F. Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

28. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

29. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

30. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

32. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

33. Finland, Lapland and Russia.
Aleko E. Lilius, care *Adventure*. History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics, outside of historical facts will not be discussed.

34. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Capt. Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

35. ✠ Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

36. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

37. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
Paul Vanorden Shaw, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

38. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

39. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

40. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

41. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C R Mahaffey, Box 304, San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

42. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern
W. Russell Sheets, 1121 Columbia Rd., Washington, D. C. Federal Territory of Quinta Roo, Yucatan, Campeche. Travel, geography business conditions, exploration, inhabitants, history and customs.

43. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

44. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

45. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. Robinson, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

46. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

47. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel· customs regulations.

48. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

49. ✠ Canada Part 7 Southeastern Quebec
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting,

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fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

50. Canada Part 8 Newfoundland
C. T. James, Bonaventure Avenue, St. Johns, Newfoundland. Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

51. Canada Part 9 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island.
Fred L. Bowden, 312 High Street, Newark, N. J. Lumbering, hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading; general information.

52. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 6720 Leland Way, Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

53. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

54. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

55. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

56. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
(Editor to be appointed.) Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
Fred W. Egelston, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

58. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

59. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.* Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

61. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

62. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

63. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section* 64.)

64. Middle Western U. S. Part 5 Great Lakes
H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio, Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps. St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich.
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure.* Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure.* Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

68. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, care of *Adventure.* Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure.* Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot River. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine
H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

72. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.
Howard R. Voight, 35 Dawson Ave., West Haven, Conn Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions; history

73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey
(Editor to be appointed). Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

74. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland
Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, care of *Adventure.*

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.*

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.* Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

CAPT. FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure. United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of forgein armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning naval and maritime affairs.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 1244¼ Leighton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. NEWMAN, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write LAURENCE JORDAN, care *Adventure.*

For general information on **U. S.** and its possessions write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police of any State,** FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care of *Adventure.*

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men,** Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

* * *

South Sea Islands

SOME thing to consider in connection with copra trading.

Request:—"What kind of an outfit would three fellows need to trade for copra, or other products in S. S. Islands?

Is there some place there where one could locate a trading post and where a regular steamer would call and buy your products, also bringing you trade merchandise?

What kind of trade goods is necessary? Please tell us general information about South Sea group, and how to get there. Also, could a man lease a bit of ground for a copra plantation? What would it cost to get where you are, in addition to outfits? Also, are there any minerals of value in Papuas?

How about pearling and the outfit needed? Vanilla and cocoanuts, etc.? If you have any dope on above we will surely appreciate it."—BERT SOAMES, Leaksville, N. C.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—CASH, a mountain of it—more good money than the Leaksville Electric Supply Company will let you carry away on a Saturday night, say, about ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS—is the first item to come up for consideration. But after all is said and done, the foregoing amount is not a —— o' a lot of coin for one who would stick in the South Sea trading game more than a week or two.

Now comes the purchase of a schooner, which, at the present time, costs a powerful amount of money. South Sea schooners are propelled by diesel engines.

Your "fleet" is assembled. You begin to think of trade-stuff. Thinking of trade-stuff has driven quite a number of Tahiti Islanders to the *I-wish-I-hadn't-done-it* class. You see, a South Sea trader never is certain just what a Polynesian native is going to take to in the way of trade-goods. For instance, one Tahiti house not so long ago sent almost a half a million dollars in trade-goods out to the Paumotu Islands. Most of it was returned to

Papeete. The stuff simply did not interest the Paumotu divers that season, that was all. . . .

Well, when through thinking about trade-stuff, you wait five or six months on Papeete beach for these goods to come out from Europe and the States. And when they do come!!!!

Your goods are in customs. Nothing will be released until you have paid the *Etablissements Francais de L'Oceanie* about forty per cent. on the total valuation. . . . France is too poor to send any money to her islands in the South Sea, you know. And who ever heard of a remote island government functioning without money?

At last. Your trade-stuff is aboard the "fleet." Now you are all dressed up. But where will you go?

The low Paumotus and the high Marquesas! The Austral group and the Gambiers. In sheer desperation, lonely, manless Napa!—which is downright folly. . . . Sail your "fleet" to all the white beaches of French Oceania. Tie up in the bluest of blue lagoons. Display your goods in every conceivable manner. Advertise a few bargain day sales. Pull down your Cash-and-Carry sign. Ever you will meet up with one thing only—no trade.

Why?

Well, —— To the native of Eastern Polynesia, from the most sought-after pearl-divers to the humblest coconut grower, you are an unknown quantity. But the princely traders of Tahiti, who have given him credit without stint and almost without end, he does know. Will he bring down upon himself and his forevermore and a day the wrath and disfavor that will surely follow should he so much as buy a can of salmon from you? He will not. . . . Let's go home.

You ask about pearling. Only native South Sea Islanders are permitted to dive. Their pearls and shell are sold or traded on the beach.

Land can be leased for vanilla and coconut-plantations. Eight years are required for bringing a coconut-plantation to maturity; three years for vanilla.

Should you decide to come out, the Union Steamship Company will peel $117.50 off your roll for second-class passage to Papeete. Their rates are subject to change without notice. Write Mind, Rolph & Company, 230 California Street, San Francisco, for schedule of rates and sailings.

Buy light and durable clothing, khaki and white drill, in the United States. Do not travel too heavily.

Shipping to Alaska

TRANSPORTATION provided by what has been called a "dignified pink fish."

Request:—"Should you answer the following questions: on shipping to Alaska, on fishing boats or working on them, I will certainly appreciate your effort.

First. To what port should I go to put in my application or sign up?

Second. What sort of work should any one apply for when he has no experience on the water?

Third. How long do the ships stay in the northern waters fishing?

Fourth. What month do they leave their home port, for the north?"—Thos. N. Hutchins, Grandfield, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—Seattle is the port at which most of the vessels for the Alaska canneries usually outfit and where they lie up for the winter. It is also headquarters for the largest cannery companies. The vessels for Southeastern Alaska start north in the early spring; those for inside Behring Straits along about June 1, sometimes a little earlier.

These vessels simply take north the cannery crews, fishermen, supplies and stock of cans, bring back the crews and output of the canneries at the end of the season. The foremen of the individual canneries generally sign on the men and are to be found, during the winter season or at the time when the boats are outfitting, at the docks of the companies. It is to them that application is made for employment, although employment agencies, in Seattle and San Francisco, sometimes furnish men for the northern canneries. The Behring Sea fleet comes out in the fall, before ice forms, the time depending on how long the run of salmon lasts and the character of the season.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Badges

AN EXTENSIVE program of training to win them.

Request:—"I have a distinguished marksman and distinguished pistol shot that I have won, and I would like to know a little about them. Would you please tell me how many have been issued to the Army and the Marine Corps?

2. How many have been issued in the last ten years?

3. When was the medal and term first given and used.

4. May any other shooting medal be worn with these two?

5. We don't know very much about these medals except that they are dashedly hard to get. So any history about either piece would help us. They seem to be very jealously guarded by their owners and there seems to be a set of unwritten rules about their wearing.

6. Is the owner's name published in the *Army and Navy Journal?*

7. Are they given to the Navy or do they get another decoration?"—Leslie C. Moss, Visalia, Calif.

Reply, by Captain Fleischer:—I am afraid I will have to shatter a conception of the "dashed difficulty" with which, as you call them, shooting medals can be gotten.

Of course, your letter does not say just exactly whether or not you refer to the marksman, sharpshooter or expert badges issued in the United States Army.

Frankly, I can not answer your questions as they stand, but from my reply you will be able to form an opinion and get the information you desire:

Rifle marksmanship is one thing in the Army which forms the greatest part of an extensive training program. Much time and infinite pain is taken to make every man a good shot. The *Army and Navy Journal*, time and time again, records the fact that every man, in every company, in every regiment in our Army "qualified," that is, has at least been hitting the "5" often enough to become entitled to a marksman badge. In my time (1910 to 1919) of active service they were graded as marksman ($2 add pay), sharpshooter ($3) and expert rifleman ($5). The rating and pay have changed, but I can not tell you offhand from memory for fear of misinformation.

Badges for excellence with the automatic are issued on par with rifle badges. Both may be worn together, under certain provisions of uniform regulations, too numerous to cite here. I can speak for the Army only and so I can not tell you about badges in Navy and Marine Corps.

The names of those entitled to them are not published, they would be too numerous, because most of our soldiers, excepting perhaps the rawest recruits, wear a shooting badge.

At one time they were hard to get and a man was very proud of them. Today, as said above, instruction and training are on such a high plane, that almost every man in a regiment shoots well enough to merit a badge and for that reason the wearing of a badge, be it the coveted "Expert" badge, has lost much of the "pride" flavor.

The Springfield is such a wonderful rifle that, if one follows instructions and does what one is told, why a miss is an impossible thing: One has got to hit the bull's-eye.

Of course, if you refer to civilian shooting—that's different. I plead ignorance. Maybe some of our "Gunmen," I mean experts, may be able to help you.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose FULL return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address Joseph Cox, *Adventure*, New York.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

DEVAL, RALPH. Last heard from Sept. 1, 1922, was aboard *S. S. President Grant.* Wrote saying he was leaving for China. Height about 6 feet, medium brown hair, blue eyes, weight about 150 lbs. S. S. was docked at Seattle, Wash. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address Mrs. A. L. Beers, Daytona, Fla.

BROWNELL, DOUGLAS. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address Mrs. S. C. Clover, 1530 Swan Drive, Tulsa, Okla.

W. W. W. Yes with all my heart. W. and M. are well and long to see you. Write to me at 407 Whigham St., hometown, I will get it. Answer at once. Always yours, S. A. G.

FREEL (or FRIEL), WILLIAM or SYDNEY. Went to California about 1864. Their father's name was John Freel or Friel), who died in or around Watsonville, Calif. Any information will be appreciated.—Address R. L. Stewart, 2304 S. 6th St., Saint Joseph, Mo.

HALTON, FRED. Formerly of Chicago, Ill. Should this meet your eye, please communicate with an old pal.—Address Frank B. Singley, 1560 Hyde St., San Francisco, Calif.

MACKLAIN, CHARLES LAURANCE. Please write your wife, Leta, in care of Aunty.

WELCH, ANDREW. Last seen in Devon, West Virginia, in 1912. Important news. Any information will be appreciated by his son.—Address Carl J. Welch, Battery "B," 17th F. A. Fort Bragg, N. C.

ROGERS, ARTHUR. Exceedingly tall man. (Nephew of Frank Hill, Famous Cricketer.) Father (Market Gardener) and mother left Sheffield, England, many years ago and settled somewhere in vicinity of Toronto, Canada. (Gardening.) Arthur last met by cousin (G. H. Hill) in Sheffield on visit about 1920. Any information will be appreciated by his cousin.—Address G. Hill, 88 Grand Drive, W. Wimbledon, London, Eng.

ANDY, (C. A.) WERNER. Oilfield worker, whose brother G. A. used to sail as Captain of Steamship out of New Orleans. Last heard of from Breckenridge, Graham and Ranger, Texas. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. G. A. Werner, 3128 Upperline St., New Orleans, La.

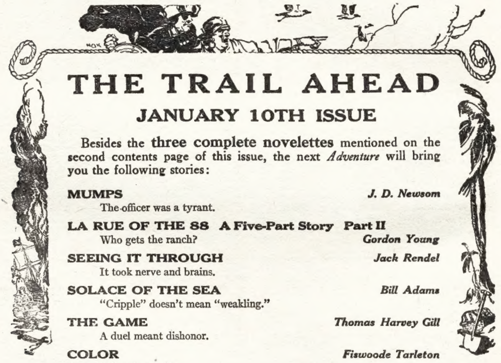
THE following have been inquired for in either the November 20 or December 10, 1925, issues of ADVENTURE. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

ANDREWS, John Oates; Bacon, Leo; Bohannan, Delbert; Bon, Walter C.; Erin, wGeorge Richard; Garland, John; Jeffers, Major Leon; Lucas, Arthur; McLaughlin, Francis; Pugh, James W.; Stevenson, Willis B.; St. John, Gaylord or Lester; Thomas, William, Isabelle, Fred, Arthur and Frank; Wieritsch, Wm.; Williams, Jonathan Robertson.

MISCELLANEOUS: A. R. P.; James Moses, Joe Vreo, Jack Spellman and Mac MacLeod; Mitchell, Wm. K.; Sanborm, Burke *et al.* or any member of the old Staff Non-Commissioned Officers Club of Coblenz.

UNCLAIMED MAIL: Addleman, Frank C.; Aldridge, F. P.; Bailey, Dick; Baptiste, Jean; Balensifer, Frank A. W.; Bell, Raymond; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Beverley, C. S.; Bishop, L. S.; Blaicher, Chas. A.; Bonner, Major J. S.; Boes, Mrs.; Baultos, Gay A.; Bourland, C. E.; Bower, B. M.; Brady, Jack Lee; Brown, Mrs. W. E.; Buckley, Ray; Buetin, F. W.; Butterfield, M. E.; Bryon, J.; Cadwallader, John Richard; Cantrell, C. W.; Caples, Albert; Carr, John; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Center, Jack; Champlain, Geo. W.; Chartrand, A.; "Chink"; Clark, Ernest S.; Clements, John; Coles, Bobby; Corbett, Fred P.; Coleman, J. J.; Collins, J. P.; Connor, A. M.; Connor, Geo. W.; Cook, Eliott D.; Cook, Wm. N.; Courtland, Victor; Crozier, W. Al.; Dalton, Fred; Davis; De Brissac, Ricardo; Dennis, F. C.; Dector, Katherine; De Orty, Henry; Donivan, Anna Lyle; Drezfus, Barney J.; Edwards, Edgar; Erwin, Phil; Farrel, Sgt. James M.; Fossum, Ralph; Franklin, R.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Garlick, Clyde W.; Garson, Ed; Grahame, Arthur W.; Green, L. E.; Grimm, H. C.; Gunn, P. R.; Hailstorm, Chief; Harmon, Richard A.; Harriss, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Heath, R. F.; Hearn, E.; Henkel, Wm.; Hooker, Wm. F.; Hooper, A. R.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Iverson, Geo. L.; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, R. R.; Jean, C.; James, Dan; Kohler, Lloyd; Kuckaby, Wm. Francis; Lange, Algot; Larisey, Jack; Larrett, Henry; Lovett, Harold S.; Larrett, Henry; La Sonn, Mrs Fred W.; Lee, Wm. R.; McAdams, W. B.; McGovern, J. V.; McKaughan, Robert S.; McKee, A. L.; McLane, A.; McNair, Henry S.; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; MacDonald, James; Marut, Ret.; May, E. C.; Miller, Walter; Minor, John; Moore, Robert; Nelson, F. L.; North, Mrs. M. P.; Nylander, Towne J.; Ogden, Carl M.; O'Hara, Jack; Overton, C. H.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Pigeon, A. M.; Posner, Geo. A.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Bob; Raymond, C. E.; Roe, Mrs. Virgie; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rutherford, May; Ryan, J.; Schafer, Geo; Schen, Walter A.; Schmidt, Geo.; Seville, Mrs. A. L.; Service, Robert; Sloan, Ch. A.; Simonds, Frank W.; Slaght, E. Olive; Smith, C. O.; Smith, Mrs. Kenneth; Sorensen, Wm. Neil; Starr, Ted; Stevens, Albert; Stewart, E. J.; Stocking, C. B.; Stonway, James; Strong, Mr.; St. Clair, Fred; Sullivan, Walter; Taylor, George W.; Tobin, Kathryn; Thaxter, Kenneth; Van Tyler, Chester; Varner, C. W.; Von Gelucke, Byron; Warren, C. Chester; Watkins, E. V.; Williams, Grover; Williams, Edward; Williams, Frank S.; Winston, Bert S.

MISCELLANEOUS: Corporal; W. S. X. V.; R. E. H.; 348; C. C. C.; H. VS.; T. W. S.; "Lonely Jack"; 2480; S177284; J. C. H.; 398; W. A. H.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

JANUARY 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

MUMPS — ***J. D. Newsom***
The officer was a tyrant.

LA RUE OF THE 88 A Five-Part Story Part II — ***Gordon Young***
Who gets the ranch?

SEEING IT THROUGH — ***Jack Rendel***
It took nerve and brains.

SOLACE OF THE SEA — ***Bill Adams***
"Cripple" doesn't mean "weakling."

THE GAME — ***Thomas Harvey Gill***
A duel meant dishonor.

COLOR — ***Fiswoode Tarleton***
It breeds trouble.

STILL
FARTHER
AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Will Levington Comfort, F. R. Buckley, Charles Victor Fischer, W. C. Tuttle, L. Patrick Greene, Georges Surdez, Leslie McFarlane and T. S. Stribling; and short stories by John Webb, S. B. H. Hurst, William Byron Mowery, John Dorman, L. Paul, F. St. Mars, Albert Richard Wetjen, Kenneth Malcolm Murray, Don Cameron Shafer, Raymond S. Spears, Captain Dingle and Robert Carse; stories of doughboys on the Western Front, prospectors in Mexico, hardcase skippers on the high seas, aviators in the oilfields, traders in Africa, white men in Japan, *condottieri* in medieval Italy, Yankee psychologists in the West Indies, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

So Simple It's Hard to Believe

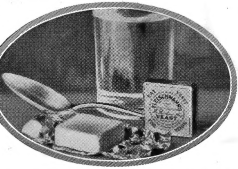
Yet this fresh, new food works surely, naturally. Here is the whole secret of its power:

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

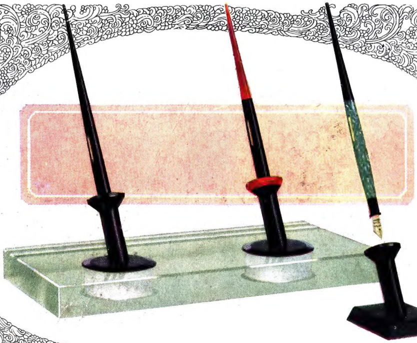
And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-23, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



THIS FAMOUS FOOD *tones up the entire system—banishes constipation, skin troubles, stomach disorders. Start eating Fleischmann's Yeast today!*

"ABOUT A YEAR AGO my face, neck and arms were covered with pimples. I was a bundle of nerves. One day my Mother told me to try Fleischmann's Yeast. I took two a day for two months. Then the miracles started to happen. My pimples vanished. I no longer jumped at every little noise. Today, thanks to Fleischmann's Yeast, I am a new girl."
ANNE M. CREMIN, New Haven, Conn.

"I AM AN OFFICER in the Merchant Marine. Day and night, in fair weather and in foul, duty confines me to the bridge. Unceasing vigilance calls for sustained alertness of faculties. This means keeping clean inside and out. Two years ago I discovered Fleischmann's Yeast. To its daily use from that time do I ascribe my present condition of physical well-being. I have proved it to be an efficacious intestinal cleanser—wonderfully invigorating. This food keeps fresh for days in the refrigerator. I restock at all ports of call. I enjoy a clear skin, fine appetite, an orderly stomach and improved eyesight—further benefits directly traceable to the proper use of Fleischmann's Yeast."
FREDERICK A. MACK, New York City.



The sign of

a Lifetime

America has long wanted and needed this fountain pen set

Here is a brand new kind of gift for busy men, and women also—another Sheaffer achievement. It is a rich and beautiful desk set, holding two fountain pens, so that they are always ready for *instant use.* The pens, of course, are the famous Sheaffer Lifetimes, made of the jewel-like Radite and made to give hard service for a lifetime. The base is of finest plate glass and the sockets are of lustrous and imperishable Radite, holding the pens in vacuums, so that they cannot dry out. Both black and red ink always at hand. This splendid and practical gift, in different styles and sizes, now at better stores everywhere.

Prices, including long pens, from $10 to $30

SHEAFFER'S

PENS · PENCILS · SKRIP

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY
FORT MADISON, IOWA

DONALD DENTON